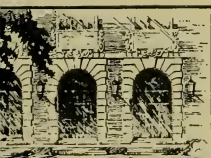



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WARP AND WOOF:

OR, THE

REMINISCENCES OF DORIS FLETCHER.

BY HOLME LEE,

AUTHOR OF "SYLVAN HOLT'S DAUGHTER," "AGAINST WIND AND
TIDE," ETC.

"Quelque différence qui paraisse entre les fortunes, il y a une certaine compensation de biens et de maux qui les rend égales."—*Roche foucauld*.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

M.DCCC.LXI.

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WARP AND WOOF.

I.

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE.

WITHIN ten days from my arrival at Aberford, poor Sofona's troubles were over, and she was laid at rest under the sod. I stayed with aunt Maria a week longer, saw her settling down into her ancient habits, and old Nancy in a fair way for recovery, and then I returned home. I had received no letter from Connie since the last which I have mentioned, and neither mamma nor Dr. Julius possessed any more recent information. A very few minutes' conversation with the latter sufficed to let me know that she had not told him a tithe of what she had told me; in fact,

she had apparently communicated nothing that could give him annoyance. I felt that such reserve was wrong and might be mischievous, but, instead of informing him at once of what I knew—which would have been the wiser step—I only wrote to her, and entreated her to be more confidential with him.

To this letter I received no answer. Easter was then close at hand, and, as I hoped, the term of all her difficulties, so I waited with patience. Ursula came over from Erlstone the Thursday before with leave to remain until the following Wednesday. We saw Dr. Julius Eden at church on the intermediate Sunday, and I noticed a peculiarly dark and preoccupied look on his face whenever I caught a glimpse of it, but I thought no more about it until Tuesday afternoon when Miss Cranmer happened to call upon us, and after some desultory chat about the forwardness of the spring, and the consequent early influx of visitors to Scarcliffe, she said,—

“How vexatious for Dr. Julius Eden to have been obliged to go up to town on Sunday night,

when the Claridges and your sister had just arrived at Combe the evening before."

Ursula and I were startled into a simultaneous exclamation of astonishment.

"Did you not know?" cried our visitor. "How very odd! why, your sister was at the concert last night with the Tom Claridges, looking as beautiful as possible. I was not aware until I saw them together that there had been another make-up between those people. Your Connie was very much noticed, I assure you—she should not be *my* governess if *I* were Tom Claridge's wife."

"Nonsense!" returned Ursula shortly, "one would think the man was a devouring lion."

"He is worse in some respects. He is a fascinating, unscrupulous fellow, who cannot himself resist the fascination of a pretty woman's face. If he were not married, I should have supposed he and your sister were courting. The room was crowded, and there was not sitting room for all on the benches, so some chairs were brought in, and he stood by hers all night, whispering in her ear ostentatiously while

his wife looked as hot and cross as could be."

"I wish you would be more cautious how you speak, Miss Cranmer," said I. "Such idle words as these of yours have compromised many an innocent name before now."

"Oh! Connie looked high and mighty enough, I assure you, and as scornful as a duchess!" returned our visitor, laughing. "Tom Claridge always had the vanity of liking to appear on good terms with the most charming woman in company, and she was the beauty last night. I suppose she means to give you a pleasant surprise, as she has not let you know she is at Combe."

"I begin to wish she was out of that house," said Ursula.

"And so you may—it would have been better if she had never entered it," replied Miss Cranmer confidentially. "To tell you the truth, it has been the wonder of most of your friends how you could let her go to such a disordered home."

"What a pity friends always speak too late,"

rejoined Ursula with as much sovereign contempt as if she herself were clear of all blame in the matter. "If there is anything right to be known, those who are most intimately concerned are always the last to hear of it; the world has its nine days' talk, and when the gossip is growing stale, it arrives at the ears of those who ought to have heard the first whisper. Doris, there is time to write to Connie before post, and we will do it. I do not attach any weight to what Miss Cranmer says, but a girl's good name is like snow—its purity cannot be too jealously guarded."

With this Ursula opened her blotting-book, and our visitor took the hint and her departure. When she was gone, however, the pen was laid aside, and we held a consultation, which resulted in my being deputed to write to Connie, instead of Ursula, because before an answer could reach us, she would have gone back to Erlstone. But the substance of the document was dictated by Ursula, who strenuously impressed on Connie the necessity of accomplishing her escape, by means of some quiet and valid

plea which we might offer to our friends in explanation of her leaving. Above all she was to beware of anything that might make a *talk*. I would add a postscript on my own account, in which I urged her to come away, excuse or none, and said that if we did not see her before the week's end, I should go over myself, and bring her home. I ventured to tell Ursie that I feared she had given bad advice to our little sister in counselling such persistent reserve, but I only received a snub for my reward.

“Of course, you will seek a scapegoat for your favourite, but I will not bear her sins,” said she; “if I had been in her place there would have been none of this vexation. I should like to see the man who would dare to take a liberty with me, or the woman who would provoke me as Mrs. Tom Claridge provokes our Connie—but I should never have tempted such annoyances, not I.”

I do not think she would; Ursula was not the kind of woman of whom other women are jealous.

All the next morning Ursula was too busy

packing to have much leisure for conversation, and about midway the afternoon, the carriage came to the door, and away she went, with her last words bidding me not forget to forward Connie's letter the day I received it. When she was off, I went down to Scarcliffe with papa and mamma, and we only returned just in time for tea as twilight was drawing in. It was a lovely evening, warm for the season, and in the lengthening shadows our garden and the Old Grove Fields looked so pretty that I was beguiled into lingering out of doors a little longer, and after a few meanderings amongst the flower-beds, where the spring bulbs were in all their beauty, I strayed into the holly walk, and up to the rustic gate at the end of it. The moment I came there, I espied a tired figure hastening along the path, and a second glance told me it was our Connie. I ran out to meet her, too much overjoyed at the moment to think of anything but that my darling was there.

She said, "I had your letter this morning, Doris," and nothing more, but there was a world of trouble in her face, and I saw that gladness

had nothing to do with her heart just then ; so I held my peace about my own, and we went up the garden hand in hand, and indoors to find papa and mamma. Their surprise and pleasure also for the instant stifled their curiosity, but after the first few minutes were over, Connie said, "It was impossible to stay there any longer, papa ; it is all so wretched," and papa made it easy by replying cheerfully, "If you were not comfortable, my little one, you were quite right to come home ; I am sure I wish you had never left us. We did not know until yesterday that you were so near at hand, or Ursie would have gone over to see you."

Mamma looked anxiously inquiring, but she did not attempt to follow when we went upstairs to our room, which was a temporary relief to both of us. Since papa's illness, we had made it a duty to spare him and mamma every trouble and fret we could ; and neither Ursula nor I had judged it expedient to repeat any of Miss Cranmer's magnified tattle of the day before, so that they were quite in the dark as to any adequate reason for the manner of her arrival ; and though the

simple fact of her being uncomfortable would satisfy papa for the present, we knew when he came to think about it he would require fuller explanation, and as Connie had studiously kept unpleasantness out of her letters home there would undoubtedly be much to explain. When we were safe in our room, and Connie had taken off her hat, I saw she had been crying and taxed her with it.

“Yes,” said she, “I have been crying; it was a miserable scene. It is of no use talking about it, and it need never go beyond ourselves, but those people had a frightful quarrel this morning, and *she* said *I* was the cause of it. I never knew what it was to feel degradation before.” There was a quick irritation in her manner of speaking which showed how her nerves had been overstrained. She sat down looking thoroughly weary, and in answer to my question of how she had come, she replied, “I walked all the way. I would not have slept another night in that house for any consideration. I left nurse to pack up my things. Do you think I have done right, Doris?”

“Perfectly right; the only right thing that could be done,” I hastened to assure her.

“Julius is away; I wish I could have seen him at once—I wish this had never happened; it will be talked about, and how he will *hate* it,” she said a minute or two after. “A letter of his was sent to me from town which he had posted here the day we left.”

“You must write and tell him all. No one who knows the people and their circumstances will dream of blaming you, unless it be for not speaking of your troubles earlier,” I told her.

She made me no answer, but got up and smoothed her hair, and as nurse Bradshaw came in for a greeting, and to ask if we did not mean to go downstairs to tea, she turned round and said, “You see, nurse, I have come back to you; I might as well never have gone away.”

“That was always my opinion, Miss Connie, but wisdom’s naught till it’s dear bought,” replied the old woman.

And with that we returned to papa and mamma in the dining-room, and spent a couple of hours in irksome, desultory talk, until papa, being tired,

went to bed, and then, with mamma and me alone, I hoped Connie would pour out her confidence freely.

But even then she was not disposed to say much, and what she did say only gave us to understand, beyond the fact of the final quarrel, what I already knew, that she had lately led an uneasy, restless life through Mrs. Tom Claridge's nervous, querulous, unreasonable moods. It did not appear that Mr. Tom Claridge had given his wife any cause for the violent accusation she had, even in his presence, made against Connie, but what might have passed of taunt and re- crimination behind the scenes previous to the outbreak she could not know. I imagined that the quarrel had been so altogether bewildering and terrible to her, that she could not have detailed it if she would. A sense of shame and degradation at being made the object of contention, and an impulse to escape from the burden and horror of such a home, seemed to have possessed her mind to the extinction of all other considerations, and there was a confused hurry about her still which betrayed the excitement

under which she had acted throughout. Her chief thought now, and her chief fear also, was, what Dr. Julius might feel and say when he heard what had happened.

She spent several hours of the night in writing to him, but tore up sheet after sheet without accomplishing anything that she could bear to send. She shrank from telling him the insult she had suffered—let all the rest of the world know, but not *him*. I could sympathize with her feelings acutely, but I could only advise confidence. Dr. Julius must learn what had occurred, and he ought to learn it from herself. My own heart sank when I remembered his character and her long concealment, but she could not bring herself to write it. She sat with the pen in her hand, and the scalding tears dropping heavily on the paper, but the tale was not told—she was unhappy and she had come home, and that was all she said.

When I remonstrated and pleaded, she threw all aside, and exclaimed passionately, “I *dare* not tell him. He is terribly severe. I would rather die than endure his suspicion and contempt.

He will be angry with me for remaining; he will say I have deceived him, and I have, but I was sorry for *her*, and Ursie urged me to keep my own counsel until my year was out, and my life seemed to have grown so unnatural, and like a piece of acting all through, that I hardly remember now either what I thought or what I did until this end came."

This confession did not lessen my dismay, when I reflected on what was to come. Connie had made a fatal mistake in withholding anything from Dr. Julius, but she was in too great distress to be told this now, and I prevailed on her to lie down and try to sleep, in the hope that daylight would show us some way out of our labyrinth. But I could not rest myself; my mind was alert, revolving our troubles, speculating on what grounds of displeasure Dr. Julius would really have, and how he would use them, and wishing—oh! how earnestly, how helplessly,—that the work of the last ten months could be undone.

Connie rose the next morning very subdued and quiet, and while I wrote my account to Ursula,

she wrote hers to Dr. Julius, still reserved, still keeping back the truth that she would rather he never knew. I could not prevail on her to act otherwise, and the letter went.

That afternoon we were sitting the two together in the drawing-room, not having been out all day, when Mrs. Peacocke honoured us with a visit. *Me* she greeted with her usual patronizing cordiality, but on Connie, after a frigid bend of the bounet, she solemnly turned her back. Connie's startled eye and crimson cheek betrayed how she felt the insulting coldness, and she left the room, on which Mrs. Peacocke said, "I am glad to see your young sister home again, Miss Fletcher."

I replied, "So were we all—the situation was too difficult for a girl."

"Both difficult and dangerous," said my visitor with austere significance, and then after a little talk on other subjects which would not flow, I am thankful to say she relieved me of her presence.

Immediately I ran upstairs to find Connie. She was in our room, standing by the window, white

and trembling all over with the vehemence of young passion. The moment I entered, she turned to me and said with a low, agonized thrill in her voice,—

“Doris, if people are going to say wicked, cruel things about me and separate me from Julius, I cannot bear it—it will kill me, I feel it will.”

I soothed her and put the matter off as well as I could, by assuring her that nobody would, unless it were such a dull gossip as Mrs. Peacocke who was never believed; but my remedy was not powerful enough to still the aching of the wound her cruel impertinence had inflicted; and on the plea of a headache the poor child shut herself up, made the room dark, and went to bed.

I regretted afterwards that she should have done so, for in the evening kind old Dr. Eden himself came up to see her, but when I told him why she was not visible, he would not allow her to be roused and made to come downstairs, which I proposed.

“I have come to hear all about it; you can tell me as well as herself,” said he, drawing his

chair close to mine, for he was rather hard of hearing, as if he expected long confidential communications. From this I conjectured that idle words were busy about us already. I told him simply all I knew—all, in fact, there was to know; and he received it with reflective gravity. When I had done he said, "I had a letter from Julius this morning; he had heard something before he went away that exceedingly annoyed him, and from what I understand, Connie has been no less secret with him than with you on all these difficulties of hers, and has never written him anything but the brightest and pleasantest news. It was foolish in the little woman, but I trust she has made a clean breast of it now."

I told him No, she was afraid to do so.

"That is a great pity; Julius can pardon almost anything but trickery and mistrust."

These were very hard words for my Connie, and I said so.

"My dear, she has written to Julius repeatedly since she went to London, and never once has she approached the fact of the reconciliation between Tom Claridge and his wife, which then took place.

He supposed her safe with the old people and all going on as at the beginning; he had one cheerful letter from her after another, intimating nothing to the contrary, when suddenly some friend communicates the fact of Mr. Tom Claridge having returned to his family three months ago; a circumstance of too great moment surely to be omitted from a correspondence such as theirs? Julius would not have left her under *his* roof a week. The man's reputation is detestable: she might take no harm, but the suggestion of it is profanation, and any attractive young woman living in his house would be exposed to remarks such as no gentleman would suffer his future wife to incur. Julius could not understand the reserve Connie has shown, and he left by mail-train that night to seek an explanation in person. Most unfortunately the Claridges had come down to Combe the day before, and so he has missed her. When he returns home it will be to hear her name bandied from lip to lip by every mischievous busybody in the neighbourhood."

"Oh, no, Dr. Eden!" I cried deprecatingly.

"It is so," repeated the old man, "it is so

indeed, Miss Fletcher. I do not say she is blamed, I only say she is talked about. Servants have long tongues, quarrels are not carried on in whispers, and that which preceded her flight is the town's gossip already. It is a sad pity, and I wish the blow had not fallen on Julius all at once; Tom Claridge's exploits have been too notorious in this place already for any daintiness in speaking about him, and to have Connie's name bracketed in the same phrase with his, is intolerable. Had she been as wise as she is loving, she would have told Julius her pains as well as her pleasures, and he would have found some way of delivering her out of them without coming to such an *escalandre* as this. Ursula has been a mischievous adviser to her; I always distrust your theoretically sensible women."

You may be sure he left me with a heavy heart and sorrowful forebodings of trouble to come.

Connie was sunk in a deep sleep of exhaustion and weariness, when I went to our room, and I was thankful to escape, for the present, having to tell her the particulars of Dr. Eden's visit.

But in the morning I repeated what it was necessary she should know, and asked if she could not even *now* write her confession and explanation to Dr. Julius.

But she said: "No, I will not write to him any more; when he comes I will tell him."

After breakfast we went out for a refreshing stroll in the garden, and while we were there, who should come in by the wicket gate from the Old Grove fields but Mrs. Maurice. She shook us both by the hand, and kept Connie's in hers all the time she spoke; she was in garden trim, and evidently in haste, but for kind reasons of her own she had chosen to be the bearer of her own message.

"The Dorcas is at my house this afternoon and I want you both to come." Connie was going to excuse herself, but the good woman added: "My dear, I know you would rather not, but I have a particular wish that you should make an effort on this occasion and oblige me."

Connie looked in appeal to me, but as I said I thought she might go, she acquiesced, though truly it was an effort.

All the assembly was settled at work when we arrived; and Connie being now somewhat of a stranger, everybody had a word to say to her, and a remark to make upon her looks or the unexpectedness of her return to Redcross; it struck me that she had been talked about by our friends before she appeared, for everybody was kind after her fashion, and even Mrs. Peacocke had retrieved her smiles and graciousness, as if to give her an assurance that she was amongst none but well-wishers. I cannot express how relieved and even grateful I felt when she had been greeted all round and Miss Pegge Burnell cried out, "Come and sit by me, my dear, you shall make my button-holes for me," and she took the offered place between the old lady and Miss Jenny Layel, who was diligently stitching at some unbleached calico garment of extensive size which all but enveloped her small person.

But though every one was as kind and studiously inobservant as possible, I was glad when the time came for us to go away. Mrs. Maurice walked back with us to our own gate, and without

any direct allusion to passing events, she contrived to give Connie a few bits of advice about keeping up her courage, and taking some good brisk walks over the downs to revive her roses which she fancied were drooping a little; then she kissed her, bade her good-bye, and turned back home again.

In our absence mamma and papa had received a visit from Dr. Eden, and from him papa had learnt all the particulars of Connie's long and foolish concealment. Mamma had named it previously, but with so many mitigating expressions that its wrongness had been half-veiled from him; now, however, he saw it as others would, and when we entered the dining-room on our return from the parsonage, a single glance at his face showed us that he was full of displeasure. Papa had from our earliest childhood been so kind and indulgent to us all that a word of severity from him was enough to break our hearts, and when he now addressed Connie, as I had never yet heard him address any of his children, she stood trembling before him and cold as clay.

“You have been taking a leaf out of Ursula's

book, I hear, Connie," said he in a stern voice. "No need to explain; I have had explanation enough. You have behaved very ill in hiding anything from us; as for Dr. Julius, if your mother had played me such a trick as you have played him, she never should have been wife of mine! You know right from wrong, and ought to have remembered what was due to him and us better than you have done, whatever Ursula urged upon you. You are not candid and sincere as you once were; your mind has got a wrong twist, and you will have to suffer for it—you can leave the room—I have no more pleasure in a child who can deceive me."

"Papa, papa, I know I have been very wrong," cried she with a breathless sob; "but don't be unkind to me."

"Go away, I do not wish to see you again this evening, and reserve your penitent excuses; if I am not very much mistaken you will have need of them all elsewhere. Doris, take your sister away and shut that door."

Connie cried most bitterly when we reached our room. Mamma came up and tried to comfort her

with an assurance that papa would soon forgive her, but once the passion of her tears loosed, she wept until from sheer exhaustion she could weep no longer.

Nurse Bradshaw would sit up by her, soothing and caressing her as if she were a child again in the nursery at Roseberry, and insinuating scraps of consolation from her treasury of proverbial philosophy at every lull in the storm. When she finally left us it was with the tender assurance that the best fruit is most pecked at, and that a hundred years hence our troubles would be all the same as if they had never happened.

II.

THE TROUBLE FALLEN.

THE next morning's post brought Ursula's letter in answer to mine, but there was nothing for Connie, though I think she looked for it. Ursula's letter was exactly like her.

"I am dreadfully mortified by what has taken place," she wrote; "could anything have been more absurd, more inconsiderate, more likely to challenge ill-natured remarks! Connie ought to have seen that it was not her own name only she was dragging into the mire, but mine as well. She should not have allowed herself to be mixed up in the quarrel, but if she could not have escaped she should have comported herself with dignity, and have left the house in a proper manner. It is nonsense to talk of her being flurried, she knew she was awkwardly placed, and

she should always have remembered herself. The story has come here in a wonderfully garbled shape, and the countess has spoken to me about it. She inclines to commend Connie, and thinks her running away quite in her favour, but I think her folly unparalleled. As for any blame being referred to me as her adviser, that is utter trash. Had I been in her situation this scandal would never have happened, I am sure the most censorious person cannot cast a slur on me, for go where I will I am respected. You must write again soon, and tell me what people say, particularly the Maurices and Miss Pegge Burnell. When does Dr. Julius return from London? I don't want to be a prophetess of evil, but I should not be at all astonished if this miserable affair broke off their engagement, fastidious as he is, and very rightly so too, and if it does, Connie will have nobody but herself to blame. I had a presentiment that marriage never would take place somehow, and mark my words, *it never will.*"

Connie did not ask to see Ursula's epistle, but mamma and papa did, and afterwards I burnt it,

but I could not as easily rid myself of the heart sickness it gave me. Papa and Connie had not met that morning, but he now bade me send her to him, and when she went he spoke to her quite tenderly, and called her his little one again.

“We are more to blame than you, my little one,” said he, “much more to blame. If we could not resist Mistress Ursula’s dogmatic counsels, how should you have greater courage? We will never be guided or driven by Ursie again, for she has been the mother of all this mischief. Come, come! you must not fret,” for she had gone down on her knees and laid her hand against his arm while the tears rolled down her face. “Give me a kiss, and let who will throw hard words at my pet, she shall hear no more from me.” Mamma and his own affection had brought him round to this good resolution. I was thankful for it, my darling would have enough to bear without finding her foes amongst those of her own home.

Miss Pegge Burnell and Miss Jenny Layel called on us together that afternoon, and would have carried Connie back to the Priory to drink

tea and spend the evening, but she declined, and they were considerate enough not to press her. Not so Miss Martha Maurice, who came the next morning, and whether she would or no, took her off to Scarecliffe, where Connie told me afterwards she had met and spoken to nearly every one she knew.

The poor child had begun to look white and anxious, very different to my blithe little sister of a year ago, and sometimes a dreary disconsolateness crept over her face that was most touching to see. She was grieving, but grieving secretly, for in our conversation she avoided all mention of the one thought that was weighing on her spirits. There had not come to any of us a single line from Dr. Julius, and he was apparently delaying his return from London. Papa and I being out together met Dr. Eden, and inquired when he was expected, but received no certain reply; he said his nephew was doing some business for him, which might keep him another week, he could not exactly say when we should see him, and I fancied the kind old man knew more than he would tell us.

From that day to the following Tuesday, nothing of marked interest occurred; but that evening we heard of Dr. Julius's return. Connie watched for him on the morrow, but he did not come. She watched for him the next day, still he did not come. Hardly could I bear to look in her face, and behold the restless torture of its expression. She sat in our window upstairs silent for hours, her heart starting at every footstep, her colour coming and going at every sound.

Since her walk with Miss Martha Maurice, she had not been beyond the garden, but on Thursday afternoon the sun was shining beautifully after a shower, and papa said he should like to go down to the library if Connie would walk with him.

"Go, Connie dear, your father has not been in the town now for more than a week," pleaded mamma.

She could not refuse, but she asked me to go too, and about half past three o'clock we set off.

With papa's chair our progress was always slow, and as we turned the corner of the High Street to go up the Borough Hill, for two or three

minutes we had Dr. Julius full in view before us, walking arm in arm with a friend. About half way up the rise they stopt, apparently intending to separate, and Dr. Julius looked back in the direction from which we were advancing, saw us evidently, and without any sign of recognition crossed the road out of the way.

Connie wavered an instant but recovered herself, and with a hand on one side of the chair went forward. Fortunately papa had not noticed Dr. Julius, the street being rather busy at that hour, or we might have had some painful remarks to bear. We were kept at the library full an hour, and I took a book to pretend to beguile the time, for when I met Connie's eyes, she just whispered, "Don't speak to me, Doris," and I saw that if I did her fortitude would give way.

It carried her home, however, and receiving a parcel from mamma which had arrived in our absence, she went directly upstairs. I was detained by mamma, who said, sorrowfully,—

"Doris, there is a letter from Dr. Julius for your father, I am afraid it is all at an end. Stay until he reads it."

So I waited and found the letter what she conjectured. It was written with some indignation, but contained nothing of reproach. The engagement must cease, he wrote, for there was no confidence on either side, and without confidence it was impossible there could be any real happiness. But if there was no reproach, neither was there any regret. Whatever Dr. Julius might have felt of pain in deciding thus, he had most carefully reserved from expression; I imagined the letter had been very hard to write, but through its cautious sentences I fancied that I traced a grieved disappointment, rather than any passionate anger at finding himself less beloved and less trusted than he had believed himself to be. Doubtless the first discovery of Connie's mistaken reserve had been a sharp mortification to him.

"The little one did not trust him, and he would never trust her again perhaps; it is better as it is, mamma," was papa's remark on the document; "it is a desperate pity, and I am afraid she will take it sorely to heart, for she is fond of him after all. Go to her, Doris, but don't tell her yet, let it break upon her by degrees."

I went heavily upstairs, but on entering the room I did not see her; passing round to the further side of the bed, however, I found her lying on the floor insensible. Upon the dressing-table was the torn cover of the parcel, and a number of letters, her own, returned to her by Dr. Julius. There was nothing else.

I swept them into a drawer, and cautiously summoned nurse Bradshaw, with whose help I got her lifted on the bed, but it was a very long while before we could restore consciousness. When she did, at last, open her eyes, it was with a dreamy vacancy, and as that cleared away she looked towards the table for her letters, a word from me tranquillized her, and the bell ringing downstairs, nurse hurried away, charged not to say a word to make mamma and papa more uneasy than they were already.

"He has sent me back my letters without a word, Doris," Connie said, when we were alone, "without a single word."

She lay quiet for some time with the dreariest agony in her face, but, at length, she raised herself on her elbow, and passing her hand across

her forehead as if to clear away some weight, she said,—

“I must get up now, I have something to do.”

That something was to return his letters to him. She kept them in a little Indian box, invaluable treasures safely guarded under lock and key, and with trembling hands she counted them over, and asked me to make them into a parcel for her. I was just finishing my task, when she cried, hastily,—

“Stop, Doris, there is a book he gave in the drawing-room, will you go down for it? and there is this ring,” drawing from her finger one Dr. Julius had placed there.

We did not talk of it, we did it and it was done, and nurse was engaged to carry the parcel to the old-fashioned house at the entering into Scarccliffe after tea.

“He will have it to-night,” said Connie.

I should have wondered at her calmness, had I not known that we commonly feel a blow less at first, than we do when the stunned weight gives place to revived sensation. She went down to tea with me, intimating that afterwards she would

leave me with mamma and papa, and I must tell them what had happened.

“And, oh, Doris! if they could help speaking to me about it,” she said earnestly.

So I told them, and mamma crept away to comfort her. That night she fell asleep in my arms, but woke up twenty times with dreadful shuddering sobs which tore my heart, and in the morning the wanness of her countenance bore witness to the anguish she was enduring.

I remember noticing that she often lifted her hand to her head that day, and at night she complained of a terrible pain there, and fancied she had struck herself in falling. It went on increasing, though she insisted it would pass off; but it did not, and a few evenings afterwards she startled us all by bursting out suddenly into an hysterical passion of tears.

Papa insisted on having Mr. Peacocke sent for immediately; and as I should go the most swiftly, I set off through the twilight, and brought him back with me. On the way I attempted to give him some explanation of how she had been lately, but he seemed to understand much better than I could

tell him. He was a kind little doctor, and clever too, and we had every confidence in him since his attendance on papa; but nurse made no secret of her contempt for his skill. When we arrived Connie was lying quiet, but fevered and suffering excessively; she answered Mr. Peacocke's few questions with clearness; but, after feeling her pulse and burning head, he told us he must put on leeches at once, and departed to procure them.

The effect of their application was favourable; the violence of the pain was subdued, but she was left with a face like death, and Mr. Peacocke pleasantly informed her, touching the wavy masses of her hair which had fallen loose in her struggles, that all those beautiful tresses must come off and be sent to the barber to make old ladies' wigs of if she gave way to excitement and brought back the fevered pain. He advised her keeping her room and her bed for a few days, at least; but the next morning, weak as she was, she persisted wilfully in rising and going downstairs at the customary hour, though when there she could only lie on the couch by the fire.

I watched her with the greatest uneasiness, but Mr. Peacocke admonished me when he came again that afternoon to set my mind at rest. He said there had been a slight shock to the brain, but with care and quietness it would pass without any further ill consequences. And thus we went on for nearly a week; Connie lying all day silent with her eyes open, and doing nothing but thinking, eternally thinking. On the Saturday after dinner there was a brisk wind careering over the downs, and rousing herself suddenly, she said, "Doris, I will go out; I shall never be well unless I can have this dreadful weight blown off my head. Let us go and see Jessie."

I expostulated, saying that would be much too far, but she was so resolutely set on having her own way that I let her get ready, hoping that she would return when she had tested her strength, and found it unequal to the exertion. She turned giddy as soon as she felt the air, but steadying herself by my arm, she contrived slowly to walk to the farther end of the Old Grove Fields. I would then have had her go home again, but she wanted to breathe the

pure freshness on the ridge of the down, and actually succeeded in climbing to that height, though when there her parted lips and pallid cheeks attested that she had done too much already. I was truly glad to get her back to the house, though nurse Bradshaw met us with the intelligence that Ursula had come to stay over Sunday. Hearing our entrance, Ursie appeared from the dining-room forthwith and greeted us—me with a sisterly kiss, Connie without. But Connie did not seem to have noticed the omission, and passing slowly into the drawing-room, put off her hat, and lay down wearily by the fire.

Ursula followed, and after regarding her hardly for a minute or two while I took off her cloak and other out-door things, asked in a sarcastic tone, “Are you become too helpless to wait on yourself, Connie; has Doris to fetch and carry for you like an invalid?”

To this Connie gave no answer, and I glanced entreatingly at Ursula to beg her silence; on which she flung out of the room with a scornful laugh; but when I went upstairs to put away

our things, she joined me to have some talk over recent events.

She was aware that the engagement with Dr. Julius was broken off, but she cross-questioned me on the particulars, and then said it was exactly what she had expected all along. It was useless to enter into any painful recrimination now, but it would much have relieved me to remind Ursie that she had been the first cause of all this trouble and suffering.

“People say everything about her that can be said, I suppose,” was her next remark.

“We have heard nothing, and all our friends are most attentive,” returned I; “what *can* people say?”

“Ah! well, you don’t know; I always warned you that her vanity would lead her into mischief some day, and it has. She is my sister, and I should be the last to think any harm of her, but I have no doubt she felt flattered by Mr. Tom Claridge’s admiration.”

“Ursie, it is cruel and wicked in you to utter such words, false every one of them!” cried I with hot indignation. “Be silent for pity’s

sake, if you have nothing kinder to say. Connie was not led away by vanity, but by foolish counsel."

"Our opinions will always differ there; her craving for approbation was the root of the mischief; I'm sure of it."

"Whatever you think you might as well keep to yourself now. You will not change my mind, and this is no time to reproach her."

"What nonsense! I consider that it would do her good to be told."

"If you want to kill her, tell her; not without."

"You are in your tragedy vein; hard words break no bones. She is not so sensitive as you fancy; she seems to me to have taken everything very quietly."

"She has not come to the worst yet."

"Is sorrow like fever; does it want nine days to get to its height? I suppose when she has got over the effects of this knock on the head, she will have to take a situation at a distance; she will never find any one to employ her in this neighbourhood again."

“Oh, Ursie! you are unfeeling! Don’t be more uncharitable than a common acquaintance!” I entreated.

“You are petting her up, as usual, but she will only hear the truth from me.”

“Then have a little mercy now. Refrain your tongue from her until she is better able to bear it.”

“That will be as it happens; if she provokes me with any of her fantastical airs and graces, I am sure to speak out.”

It is hard to believe that Ursula was intentionally cruel, but when we three were in the drawing-room together after tea, she began to peek at the sore subject in her irritating tone, and stabbed the poor child in a hundred ways. I wondered at Connie’s patience. She lay with her head low on the cushions, and her face half concealed from us, answering what was said but rarely, and then in few words, as if the mere opening of her lips to speak was an exertion. Ursie was evidently annoyed at what she mistook for apathy or indifference, and, at length, with vexed abruptness, she asked,—

“Where shall you seek a situation when you are fit to go out again, Connie?”

“Here. I will not go to live from home again. I will find some daily teaching, like Miss Kitty Layel,” replied Connie in a low voice.

“That may not be so easy.” To this Connie gave no answer, and I tried in vain to stop Ursula from going on, but she only raised her eyebrows defiantly and continued,—“I should not have thought you would particularly like to stay here after your quarrel with Dr. Julius.” Connie was still silent, and by Ursula’s rising colour, I knew her petulant temper was rising too, and would soon get the better of her discretion. It did at the next words—“And after the way in which your name has been gossiped over too; you will not like to meet the consequences of an ugly report wherever you go.”

“I shall live it down, Ursie,” replied Connie in a forced, unnatural voice, and then she lifted herself up from the sofa, and went slowly to the door, feeling her way before her, like a blind person who is afraid to fall. I would have

followed her, but she put me back with a gesture of her hand, and I stood below watching her go up the stairs, holding by the bannisters until she disappeared.

When I re-entered the drawing-room I was met by Ursula's triumphant remark,—

“You see how little she is affected! she very naturally does not like to hear of it, but she only tries to get out of the way.”

Such obtuseness was inconceivable to me, but I made Ursie no answer, and after walking to and fro the room a little while, I went upstairs and listened at our door; but all was still within, and I did not enter then to disturb the poor child, for during the last week she had liked to be much alone. I returned, however, immediately after prayers, and when I went in I thought she was lying awake, but she did not answer when I spoke, and on going close and touching her I saw that she was unconscious of my presence, and though her eyes were open, they were quite blank and expressionless. In vague alarm I summoned nurse, who, after looking at her a minute or two, said,—

"It is not a swoon—I never saw any one like this before, Miss Doris; she neither sees nor knows us," and then she applied the ordinary remedies to revive her, but without effect, and Ursula, hearing an unusual stir in the room, came in demanding what *was* the matter?

"That is just what we don't know, Miss Ursula," replied nurse. "Come you and sponge her forehead with this vinegar and water, while I slip away for Mr. Peacocke." But I took the basin instead, and Ursula, after one glance at the strange, unconscious face, shrank timidly out of the room, and went to tell papa and mamma.

We were standing together round the bed when nurse returned with Mr. Peacocke, but he speedily sent off papa, mamma and Ursie, and from his grave and almost annoyed expression, it was evident that he considered Connie in a much more serious state than when he had seen her before.

"Women are not famous for discretion," was his remark, when I told him of her walk that

afternoon; "she ought not have gone out at all, but I do not see how this mischief is chargeable on fatigue alone. Do you keep agitating subjects from her? I will answer for nothing if the irritation of painful feeling is kept up now—where are your scissors, nurse? all this had better come off at once." He lifted up a long and heavy braid as he spoke, and nurse obeyed his order without hesitation, while I stood by and watched the sacrifice. "I shall stay here to-night," said the doctor after it was done. "I must watch her for a few hours. Miss Doris, you had better go to your bed; I am afraid there will be plenty of work for you by and by. Nurse will remain with me, and we shall want a relief by morning."

I took his dismissal very quietly. I hardly remember what I felt or what I feared, but I went in search of mamma. Neither she nor papa appeared, however, to have taken any serious alarm; we had all been hardy children, and had never had much sickness in the house, and they evidently thought this attack would be as brief as the last; papa had his ready

explanation for it which he offered to me by way of encouragement, when I presented my saddened face before them,—

“Don’t fret yourself, Doris,” said he almost cheerfully; “you must recollect how Connie’s mind has been harassed, and that reacts on her body, but she will get over it presently. Nobody ever does die of a broken heart except in a story book.”

Had the cause of her illness been less obvious, he would have been distressingly anxious, but that a grief of mind had brought it on certified to him that it would quickly pass. But there was one to whose conscience the sight of Connie’s blank face had struck a chill, and that was Ursula. I went to share her room, being driven from my own, and she met me with an air aghast, and asked,—

“Doris, do you think she will die?”

“I trust not, Ursie, but I cannot tell.”

“I wish I had not said what I did to her—I had no idea she would take it so.”

“I hope she will live long enough for you to be good and kind to her.”

And with that we were silent.

Words were of little use, now that the ill was done. It was in the hand of God only to decide whether there should be opportunity to undo it ever given or no.

III.

THE NARROW PASS.

THERE was little change, if any, before the morning, and Mr. Peacocke spoke with increased anxiety. About six o'clock he went home to prepare some fresh remedy, and I took his place. Ursula was up too, fidgeting restlessly from room to room, bewildered by the suddenness of Connie's illness. At length nurse, who was very tired, and had only slept at intervals through the night in a chair, suggested that she should go to the cottage of the mother of Sarah, the rough and ready young woman, who was with us at our first coming to Redcross, to inquire if she could be spared to help us in our emergency—an errand she thankfully undertook.

Sarah arrived with her bundle about an hour afterwards, and before breakfast-time the news

of our trouble had reached the parsonage, and brought kind Mrs. Maurice to ask if there were anything she could do for us. She saw poor Connie, and afterwards mamma, and from that moment a fear of the worst had possession of us all, but we did not speak of it to each other.

Ursula was the only one who went to morning service at the church, and before it was half over even she returned, crying and distressed. Mr. Maurice had requested the prayers of the congregation for a young person who was dangerously ill, and she had come away, unable to control her sobs. At church-leaving time every one in the parish who knew us stopt to inquire with the most feeling interest. There was not a single creature, whether high or low, who did not love our Connie. I wondered within myself how Dr. Julius Eden had borne it. I was especially touched by lame little Jessie's arriving in the evening with a couple of rudely coloured Scripture prints, representing our Saviour healing the Sick and Suffering on the Cross himself, which, the child said, it would maybe

comfort Connie to look at; a lady who came to the Infirmary had given them to her when she was ill, and they had done her good. Throughout the whole of that day there was no change in Connie perceptible to me; she did not recognize or speak to any of us. She lay perfectly unconscious and motionless—her face like death without its peace. I could have imagined her sensible of agonizing thoughts, of a heart bleeding inwardly, while her body was still, and all external objects were veiled from her.

In the morning Ursula went back to Erlstone—glad to escape, I think, from the suffering and anxiety that pervaded the house. I was not sorry to lose her, for she was no help to us, and having recovered from the first shock to her fears, she had reverted to her original sentiments concerning Connie, and endeavoured to cheer herself and us with reiterated assurances that for all that had fallen upon her nobody was responsible but the poor girl herself.

Three more heavy days and nights passed over my darling, but on the fourth there was a change; for a few hours she was half sensible

but soon she grew light-headed, and began to talk incoherently. Then followed wild fits of delirium, in which she was almost unmanageable. In the intervals between them the blank of her face was despair. She could not be left a moment unwatched, and Mr. Peacocke warned us that it might be necessary to confine her hands. His remedies failed of their effect, and he was often baffled because he dealt with the body only, and could not touch the mind; she was obstinate too, and frequently refused them. A sense of exquisite pain and anguish, and a longing for death, possessed her solely; but the rest she craved did not come to her. For five long weeks she lay thus beating on the rocks which enclose the quiet waters of death without getting into the haven; her moans rang through the house, her countenance was most piteous to behold.

Mr. Peacocke evidently began to fear for her more than he would say, but in spite of his cautiousness I detected his secret dread; as she battled so long, he began to think that her youth and constitution, elastic as a spring, might

carry her through the suffering and prostration consequent upon it; and yet leave her with a mind alienated for ever. I remember poor Edith Westmore, and said to myself,—

“Better the grave than that dead-alive, awful, humiliated existence!”

Ursula came over to see her at this period and was much shocked at her appearance, which was painfully emaciated. We were all standing round her bed, unknown and unnoticed, when Ursula put my secret thought into words, by saying,—

“She looks as if she never could be herself again.”

“It would be a mercy and a blessing if it would please God to take her,” was my sorrowful answer, and poor mamma, sighing, said so too.

Nothing could be kinder or more constant in their inquiries than all our friends, but we were now in one of those straits of life when only God could help us. Sir William and Lady Claridge, their daughter-in-law and the little children, came over repeatedly to inquire after Connie, and the unhappy lady whose behaviour

to her had been once so unkind was now the most eager to speak in her favour. She had learnt by some means that Dr. Julius Eden had cast her off in the midst of her undeserved troubles, and in the idea of undoing some of the complicated evils that want of thought had occasioned, I learnt afterwards that she had gone to him and said her utmost to exculpate Connie, though she thereby exposed her own jealous perversity and provocations.

Dr. Julius Eden himself I had never seen from the day of that accidental meeting on the Borough Hill, but I heard of him now and then through mutual friends, especially through Miss Theodora Bousfield. I think every voice was against him. Miss Pegge Burnell distinctly asserted that he had done Connie a monstrous wrong; for had she been less known and less beloved by a few good women who would support her in every way, his act would have stamped her with infamy for all the days of her life. Miss Martha Maurice preached forgiveness to me, but on her own account she declared she would never speak to Dr. Julius again. Even

Miss Theodora condemned him. In the first insanity of his rage against Connie, he had declared that he would go and crush her with his reproaches, but when he came to prepare that packet of letters, innocent love-tokens that we have seen her receive, his mind wavered into tenderness. He dwelt on the sweet and dangerous vision of her beauty, and recollected that he was never his own man, never quite under his own influence when he came within hers, and prudential considerations mingling with his wrath, he stayed away, eschewed her presence, and sent in his resignation as has been narrated. He never believed things had been so bad as was at first represented, but still the girl who could mischievously deceive him, and give cause for gossip by her careless behaviour, was no wife for him. He could not, he averred, consistently with his honour, have done otherwise than put her away. Connie had been foolish and reserved, but I think when his first gust of anger was over, he must have had uneasy, compunctious visitings at times, lest he had been hasty, cruel, and premature in what he had done. I could

not but blame him severely, and I could only regard him as unfeeling, when I heard of him looking perfectly well and going about to his dinner-parties just as usual, while my darling lay suffering with heart-break in her face, and wearying for God's peace, which would not come.

Another week elapsed, and I was almost worn out by night-watching, when Ursula claimed her holidays earlier than usual, and at the beginning of June came home, and occasionally relieved me. It was then nearly two months since I had left the house; the hedges and woods were green, the air began to blow like summer in the garden. I was ever reluctant to abandon my post in Connie's room, for Ursula, with the best intentions in the world, made a bad sick nurse; but one morning, when Mr. Peacocke came to pay his visit, he fairly drove me out of doors, bidding me not return for an hour, unless I wished to be laid up and worse than useless myself.

I went towards the cliffs, and truly I enjoyed the sunshine and the white glitter of the waves like a prisoner escaped. And then I fell to

thinking would *she* ever see them again—my darling! my darling!

I had walked about half a mile, when, stopping to look back, I saw some one swiftly following, and as the figure drew nearer, I recognized Dr. Julius Eden. He called me by my name, and asked abruptly how *she* was? He looked well in health, but extremely agitated, but I felt to *hate* him just then, and gazing straight in his face, I replied, with cruel deliberation,—

“She is at death’s door, Dr. Julius; and if she die, I shall always say you are as much her murderer as if you had thrust a knife into her heart!”

He made a passionate gesture with his hand, and left me without a word.

I returned home to find Connie in one of her delirious attacks, which had been less frequent for a few days past; nurse was sitting up on the bed restraining her in her arms, and poor papa and mamma were on the landing outside the room, remonstrating with Ursula. Ursula had her own theories of management for sick as well as sound, and, considering Connie unreason-

able, she had contradicted her, and refused to give her drink because she fancied she had had as much or more than was good for her. Mr. Peacocke happened to return with some omitted order for nurse, in the midst of Ursula's oration ; he had found Connie feverish and excited again, and had ordered the cause of it from the room with a peremptory veto on her ever re-entering it. So I determined to leave my darling no more until she was either restored to herself or we streaked her lovely limbs in her coffin.

That night, rather late, after nurse had fastened up the house indeed, there came a cautious summons at the door, and on its being opened, good old Dr. Eden presented himself, and asked to speak to me. I went down to him, and it was as I expected—he wanted to see Connie, and to assure himself and Julius that all was being done for her that human skill could do. He had called on Mr. Peacocke, and that gentleman wished, for his own satisfaction as well as ours, that we should have another opinion. A slight noise without caused me to advance my head and look, when I saw Dr. Julius himself

in the shadow of the wall. I closed the door on him, and led Dr. Eden softly upstairs, first entering to tell nurse who was coming. She seemed much satisfied, and said she was glad of it, for she had never thought "no great shakes" of Mr. Peacocke herself, though the rest of us did put so much faith in him.

Connie was lying passive and feeble again; her eyes were open, but there was no speculation in them. I fancied, however, that she seemed sensible it was not Mr. Peacocke who was holding her wrist, but we could not tell whether she recognized Dr. Eden or not. He did not say much, and his countenance was so inscrutable that I could not decipher whether he thought ill or well of her present condition. He talked to nurse apart a few moments, looked at the medicine she was then taking, ordered it to be discontinued, and then went away, bidding us not lock the house-door again until we had received something which must be administered immediately. Dr. Julius himself brought it and gave it into my hand, but we never spoke.

Ursie was very angry at what she regarded

as an insolent intrusion, but it was my darling's life and reason were in question, and if these men of skill could save her, I was humble enough to accept anything from them, even from him who had brought her so low.

The new medicine threw her into a deep sleep, which lasted until late in the following morning, and she woke from it visibly better. Dr. Eden saw her again, and appeared satisfied, and under his treatment a beneficial effect became in a few days quite apparent. Shall I ever forget the first time she looked at me intelligently, and uttered conscious words? I never saw papa weep before that evening, but, when mamma led him into the room and she smiled at him a wan recognition, he bowed his head down on the little one's pillow and cried like a woman.

Mr. Peacocke told us then that she would live and be herself again; not all at once perhaps, but as strength returned. Still there must be care and quiet, and days and months of pitiable weakness to go through, but she was our own once more. I had often need to recur to his assurance for comfort in the time that now ensued,

for in her feebleness the poor soul talked very strangely, and was possessed still by many of the fancies that had haunted her delirious dreams. She fretted, too, continually, and said often she longed to die, for there was no hope in her life. I saw in the white, languid face and weary eyes, that it was most true; she had reawakened to a life without any hope in it. We used to set flowers before her, and she would sometimes notice them and ask for them to be brought nearer, but she mostly lay with eyes closed, neither asleep nor awake, but wishing, I felt sure, that she could escape out of the great pain of living and be at rest.

It was hard to know what to say to cheer her; she never complained, and she was wearily grateful for everybody's kindness; but, unlike all other persons whom I have seen recovering from a long and dangerous illness, she never spoke of when she should be well again. She liked mamma and me to read by her the prayers she could no longer read herself; but one day she stopped us, and said they were of no use to her—they did not ask what she wanted.

“What do you want, my dear love?” said mamma caressingly.

She looked at her and sighed, but answered nothing. She had learnt to see now what grieved us, and tried to refrain herself from expressing her tedium of life.

Mr. Peacocke saw this phase of her weakness with great dissatisfaction. Dr. Eden had discontinued his visits since Connie was capable of recognizing him, but, indeed, her disease now was beyond the skill of physicians.

“This will never do, we must have her roused,” Mr. Peacocke declared. “Let her friends come up and see her; she will object, but you must not mind that. Begin to-day.”

We did not tell Connie what he had directed, but Miss Pegge Burnell, calling that afternoon, saw her for a few minutes. Connie remembered politeness, and bore with her visitor while she stayed, but afterwards she begged not to have any more people brought up to her room, and the following day we sent Miss Martha Maurice and Miss Layel away, though Mr. Peacocke himself had bid them come. The first person

who really did her any good was little lame Jessie. While she lay at the worst the child came every day to ask after her, and about this time she presented herself with a basket of wild flowers gathered in the woods, and wished to see her. Nurse Bradshaw therefore brought the little body upstairs, and, opening the bedroom door, announced with a cheerful voice,—

“Now, Miss Connie, here’s some one come you’ll like to see, I’m sure ; guess who it is.”

“Is it little Jessie?” asked Connie, pleased both in her look and tone, and forthwith entered Jessie, preternaturally solemn and demure.

She stood and stared at Connie for ever so long, with an air of bewildered astonishment, but at last she said,—

“*Surely*, miss, that isn’t you?”

To which Connie replied, with a wan smile,—

“I’m not sure, Jessie, but they say it is.”

“What’s come of all your hair?” demanded the child.

“Gone to make old ladies’ wigs of,” answered Connie, amused in spite of herself at this disrespectful curiosity. “Climb up on the bed,

Jessie—I cannot see you standing there—and tell me how you have been going on.”

“I’ve gone on famous, Dr. Julius Eden says. I’ve a pair of pins now, not so handsome as some folks, but quite good enough to walk with,” returned Jessie, doing as she was bid, and seating herself up on the bed with her back against the foot-board, and thus arranged they sat and looked at each other without speaking for some minutes. I confess the next words from little Jessie startled me.

“It was Dr. Julius Eden as told me to come here to-day. He said I was to put my knitting in my pocket. It’s a stocking for father; I can turn the heel now, miss. Would you like to see it?”

Connie took the coarse worsted fabric in her delicate hands, examined it, and pronounced it very nice, with which verdict Jessie seemed much gratified.

“Shall I stop with you a bit, miss, as you used to stop with me?” now asked the child, acting under instructions, I felt sure.

Connie acquiesced, and a few minutes after-

wards suggested that I might go out and take a walk with Ursie while she stayed. I took her at her word, and left them together. I do not know what they talked about, but it was nothing harmful, for when I returned to send Jessie away, Connie was looking less dejected than I had ever seen her do since the beginning of her illness.

Her next acceptable visitor was Mrs. Maurice ; for her she inquired before she came, and so we sent for her. Connie had taken an affection for her, I knew not why, and being drawn on to speak of herself, the poor child soon betrayed her weariness and hopelessness.

“ My dear little one,” said Mrs. Maurice, tenderly but firmly, “ you are rebelling against God ; He gives you a renewal of life, and you are unthankful. You want to choose your own cross, instead of bearing patiently what He has laid on you.”

“ I could have borne anything but this,” murmured Connie.

“ But what, my love ? ”

“ But this cruel disgrace. It is unmerited,

but it breaks my heart. Who will care for me any more?"

"We shall all care for you, and even did we not, you know there is One who never fails those who put their trust in Him. Is it better to suffer being innocent or being guilty, when suffer we must? I think, Connie, it is better to suffer wrongfully than to have deserved our chastisement. Look beyond us to God, and He will give you courage to live."

"You don't know the torture of being despised."

"My darling, who despises you? None of us, I'm sure. You are thinking of Dr. Julius; he condemns your reserve with him and your friends at home, and so do we all, Connie; it was very foolish, indeed, but you fancied it was kind. Well, a mistake is but a mistake, and we overlook it and understand it, because we know you, and know you like to shut up troubles in your own poor little heart. I say that Dr. Julius used you with rash cruelty, but he does not *despise* you."

"I have no pleasure in living now. I have no hope."

“You are weak and suffering, and must bear God’s will patiently; love of life will return with strength, and if the desire of your heart be really for your good He will bring it to pass. Look outwards and onwards beyond this troublous time, and entreat of Him peace and resignation. My dear child, are you the first who has suffered injustice? You must not succumb to it; you must be brave, and look your future in the face and never let any unfriend have the chance to say that a lying rumour might have been true from the cowardice with which you have sunk under it.”

Connie drew a long breath.

“I shall live, I know, and in time I shall have to go out again,” said she; “and every one will turn their backs on me, as Mrs. Peacocke did, and wherever I go I shall have to meet the consequences of an evil report, as Ursie told me. At first I felt resentful; I thought I could live it down, but I am very young, and my spirit is broken. I don’t care now. Oh! if I could only fall asleep and never wake any more.”

“My child, your time is not God’s time; you

must wait and you must endure. See it inevitable. We will all help you as far as women can help each other, but the safest reliance is higher than this. As you lie here in your helplessness, think of Him who endured the extremity of suffering and despised the uttermost shame. I know, my love, your comfort must come from Heaven, for the dearest hope you had on earth is taken away. We do not undervalue your sorrows, but we do know that even for them there is healing in the power of God. You may never quite forget them—it would not be good for you if you did, but life is too great and serious a thing to be bound in one earthly affection, or wasted for one earthly loss; happiness will surely return to you, dark as the world looks now.”

Connie looked sad, as if her faint vision could not penetrate the clouds at all, but I fancied that she was somewhat soothed, and that her quietness took from that day forth a tint of gentle patience such as is akin to hope.

IV.

VERY DARK DAYS.

As soon as Connie was able to go downstairs, Mr. Peacocke began to advise a thorough change of air and scene to facilitate her recovery, and aunt Maria wrote to beg that she might be sent to her. Aunt Maria, unrelenting and severe as she could be to herself, was yet all that is kind and desirable in a nurse, and in summer even Aberford was pleasant; it was therefore on the point of being agreed that I should take her over there, when Miss Pegge Burnell proposed, as a more salutary variety, that we should accompany her to Southill, a small estate she possessed a few miles out of Port Harborough, which she was in the habit of visiting every year for a few weeks.

At the first note of this invitation Ursula figuratively pricked up her ears, and immediately

set about deposing me from my office of Connie's companion in favour of herself. I might have gone to Aberford and welcome, she said, but she hoped I would not be so selfish as to deprive her of the chance of going to Southill, a place she had always longed to see, and besides, unless she could have a little cheerful variety before she went back to Erlstone, she was quite sure she should never be equal to her work. I did not meet her views with cordiality, and Miss Pegge Burnell, though far from covetous of her society, could do nothing more than bid us settle it amongst ourselves, and as might have been expected from the beginning, Ursula gained her point. I was dissatisfied, but I tried to calm my doubts of her comfortableness to Connie by reflecting that she would probably act with more caution and kindness, since she had learnt, by experience, that though hard words break no bones, they may still be made the instruments of cruel mischief. Yet it was not without misgiving that I saw her set out in charge of my poor white-faced invalid, who was too subdued to resist or care much what happened.

The night before they left, mamma charged Ursula to be tender of her, not to thwart, or contradict, or reason with her, and, above all, not to reproach her, to which Ursula pettishly replied,—

“There, mamma, that will do; you need not school me as if I were a baby; surely I know that a delicate person must be humoured,” which tone was not promising.

Connie had submitted, without a word of remonstrance, to all the arrangements that were made for her, but when she was packed into the railway-train with Miss Pegge Burnell and Ursula, she bent her dear face down to kiss me, and whispered with the tears in her eyes,—

“I wish it had been you, Doris, but you will write to me very often.”

I promised, and as the guard came along to shut the carriage doors with his prompt “By your leave, ladies,—by your leave!” I stood back on the platform to watch her to the last moment, and when the train had rolled slowly out of the station, I returned home sorrowfully enough. But the next morning I was cheered again by a

few lines from Miss Pegge Burnell to say that they are arrived at Southill safely, and that Connie had borne the journey almost better than she expected. Papa and mamma brightened up too, and began to say that the little one would come back to us her blithe self again in the course of a week or two, and though I was not quite so sanguine as that, I believed and trusted that the worst was over, and that time would effectually restore both her health and her cheerfulness.

The particulars of her absence from home I learnt from hearsay, from herself, from Ursula, and from Miss Pegge Burnell, and at the time they were painful and contradictory enough; but the truth gradually eliminated itself out of the confusion, and as it appeared to me and still appears, I shall now detail it.

Ursula's method of nursing was not salutary, but Connie endured it with marvellous patience and began to prosper in spite of it, before they had been domiciled at Southill a week. She felt inspired with courage to live since Mrs. Maurice had talked to her so kindly, and though she

believed she could never be happy again, still she could rest on the faithful affection at home, and perhaps in some time far distant she might attain to the peaceful content in which she saw my days flowing by. Sometimes the poor child would have liked to talk about this gleaming hope, but it was not Ursula's way to respond to thoughts of this kind; she called them "sentimental stuff," and Connie was not encouraged to seek comfort at her lips. Wounded almost to the death as she had been, she craved incessantly for assurances of affection, but though Ursula could not be termed undemonstrative, her demonstrativeness did not take the guise of any balm such as soothes and heals a broken spirit; quite the contrary indeed.

Her first principle of treatment was like that of some nurses with children—contradiction. It was impossible, she declared, that Connie should know what was good for her, and to thwart her in a hundred petty, irritating ways seemed to be the ultimate perfection of all her endeavours. Ursula spoke fairly and considerately of her sister to Miss Pegge Burnell, and the old lady, quite unsuspecting of her private tyrannies, left them

much together in the large south-fronting room which had been allotted for their occupation as the most cheerful and pleasant in the house. It had three windows looking over the long levels towards the broad tidal river which flowed through Port Harborough, and over sloping fields where the haymakers were busy with their summer harvest. Connie liked nothing so well as sitting up in one of these windows watching them, or watching the clouds or the moted air, with the sun full upon her. She always loved sunshine, and now she fancied herself less wretched when it warmed her. She could make no effort of thought, books and work were equally beyond her, but she had a certain sense of quiet and refreshment in the brightness of the sky and the cheerful serenity of the landscape.

When Ursula was busy or in a good humour she would let her lie undisturbed, but if anything ruffled her she always rattled down the blinds on the plea of too much light, and Connie's occupation being gone, she usually betook herself to the couch and buried her face, and where it had lain the cushion was always wet with tears. The poor

child's solitary thoughts were mournful company. But all these grievances notwithstanding, she appeared to be doing well, for at intervals she had strength to look beyond them, and the effort sustained her. Then the weather was glorious, the atmosphere pure and clear, and to be in the sunshine, and drink the balmy air, was more invigorating than wine. Every day at noon she went out for ten minutes or so into the old-fashioned flower-garden, which was screened by trimly clipt hedges of a great height from the harsh, cutting east winds, which blew over that low-lying country in the spring. Miss Pegge Burnell was always her companion in these saunters, and Connie thought them the happiest bits in her days, for the old lady loved her, and showed it, and was indulgent to her in every possible way. At length they suggested to each other the pleasantness of a drive, and though Ursula would peremptorily have interdicted it, they made common cause against her, and carried their point, and the change did Connie such visible good that there was no longer a plea to keep her in the sheltered and monoto-

nous garden, and Miss Pegge Burnell wrote home to us at Redcross that she was improving amazingly.

But very soon there was another falling away, and the inflowing tide of strength ebbed back again lower than ever.

The first drive Miss Pegge Burnell took Connie was through country lanes, fragrant with new hay in the fields and gay with wild-flowers in the hedges, but the second was in the opposite direction towards Port Harborough. Ursula was with them, and she wished it. When they were within half a mile of the town, Miss Pegge Burnell happened to mention a new dock which had been recently completed, but not yet opened for the reception of vessels, and which lay only a field's length off the part of the road where they were passing. Ursula had never seen such a place, and at her desire the carriage was stopt, and she got out for the purpose of viewing it; Connie would go too, she was sure she could walk that little distance, and after a slight demur she was permitted to have her own way. Miss Pegge Burnell said she would just drive on for a quarter

of an hour to give them time for their inspection, and then return to take them up again.

Connie's best pace was still no better than a trail, and Ursula, after impatiently keeping step with her for twenty yards or so, set off alone at a brisk walk, and left her to follow at leisure. She soon came to the dock-side, which she afterwards described to me as an ugly place—an awful place. She was not given to flights of imagination, but looking down over the wall of hewn stone to the sullen water far below, and black as ink from the reflection of a grey thundery sky, she shuddered and drew back with haste, and though she marched along to the farther end, she took care to keep at a safe distance from the edge. When she turned she saw Connie wearily dragging her feet to the brink, but instead of starting away as she had done herself, she continued to stand and look down on the water. Ursula quickened her steps, calling out sharply,—

“Come away, Connie, it is not safe—come away,” but Connie paid no heed; her figure seemed to oscillate, and she lifted her hands as if feeling for a support, when Ursula broke into a run, caught

her by the arm, and pulled her away, exclaiming,—

“How could you be so silly as to stand there until you were giddy? Why did you not move when I called?”

“I could not; something was drawing me down to the water,” was the faint answer; “let me rest, Ursie;” and seeing that her limbs were all but failing her, Ursula let her sit down on a heap of stones that the workmen had left, and afterwards helped her back to the carriage which was waiting.

Miss Pegge Burnell perceived at once that something had happened, and made her inquiries, when Ursula told her story in the exaggerated style peculiar to herself. Connie had dropt behind, she said, perversely to give her a fright, and had planted herself on the extreme edge of the dock-side, where a sudden gust of wind might have blown her off; as it was she could hardly keep her feet, and was swaying over the water just as if she meant to throw herself in, when she rushed forward and dragged her away out of danger. She had saved her life, but, of course, that was nothing, though when she should get

over the shock it had been to her own nerves she really could not tell.

Miss Pegge Burnell naturally observed that she ought not to have imperilled her sister by leaving her to herself in her weak condition, on which Ursula replied,—

“Oh! she did it on purpose, I will never believe otherwise; she does not pretend to say she cannot see straight before her.”

The old lady looked at Connie, and judged it wise to drop the subject. The poor child had huddled herself into a corner of the carriage, and was sitting with wide open, terrified eyes, while every now and then dreadful shudders convulsed her from head to foot. She did not speak in her own defence, but her mouth quivered, and her breath came in short, quick, panting sobs.

“She has had a good fright, but it was nobody’s fault but her own,” said Ursula, “and I suppose now she has taken cold.”

When they reached home Connie had to be carried upstairs and laid in bed, and by the time the kind old housekeeper had done that and left the sisters together again, Ursula was dressed

for dinner and ready to go down to the drawing-room.

“Don’t leave me, Ursie,—don’t leave me!” supplicated Connie as she watched her clasp on her last bracelet and turn to the door, “that dreadful place haunts me.”

“You are safe enough now at all events—why should I miss my dinner?” said Ursula.

“Then will you ask Harris to come and sit with me until I fall asleep. Do, dear Ursula.”

“What ridiculous nonsense! One would think you were a baby of three years old. I shall ask nothing of the kind, for I am sure Harris has something better to do.” And with that Ursula went down to dinner and ate with an excellent appetite.

Connie lay fretting. Oh! for mamma’s gentle fondness or for my arms around her! Some of the wicked thoughts that had troubled her when she was ill were coming back. She tried to see us all at home and to fancy what we might be doing, but that black water swept across the picture and washed it out. Then she tried to pray, but she could not hear the words in her

heart for the dizzy terror in her brain. And so the long summer evening drew in to dusk, and Miss Pegge Burnell arrived to kiss her good-night, and Harris with her cup of arrowroot which she could not swallow. Then there was an hour's wakefulness in the dark, with the darker ripples of that deadly temptation flowing through it, and nothing else but an inarticulate cry to Heaven which seemed to knock at its gates in vain. Then Ursula came to her, then sleep, then dreams—terrible dreams with that water in them all. She woke up twice with a startled cry which woke Ursula too, and the comfort she got was this—"I declare, Connie, if you will be such a nervous coward, I won't sleep with you, and that's certain!" But Ursula dropt off again while the words were on her lips, and Connie held her hand tight against her heart to hush its wild throbbings.

For years after, that black water haunted her sleep, and she would wake up in the dark night-time, trembling in every nerve and shuddering like one who has just escaped a deadly and imminent peril.

Three days after this incident Ursula's effect on a sick heart and sick brain came to a crisis.

The morning's post brought Connie a letter from me, which Miss Pegge Burnell handed out of the bag to Ursula for the purpose of being carried upstairs to her sister. Ursula took it and left the room, but instead of bearing it straight to Connie, whose heart yearned for a word of love from home, she stopt by the way, opened and read it, and finding it full of the religious tenderness which always vexed her as so much cant, and not a single rebuke from one end to the other, she crushed it up into a ball, put it in her pocket and went forward to their room empty-handed.

Connie lifted her head hastily from her pillow as the door opened, but Ursula immediately announced with a beautiful simplicity of falsehood that there was nothing for her, and she sank back with a sigh of utter disappointment, turned her face to the wall and cried furtively for ever so long. Meanwhile, Ursula stationed her person before the looking-glass, rearranged her hair, assured herself by a close and critical examination

that her complexion would do, opened and shut two or three doors with emphasis, and then, saying abruptly that when Connie wanted to get up she could ring for her, left the room perfectly serene in countenance whether at ease in her conscience or not. Connie was so weak that a very little thing would cause the tears to flow, and in the intention of evading Ursula's taunts about her giving way, she rose when she was gone, and with many a rest between contrived to dress herself and brush out her short crop of wavy curls. It was her custom to throw a half-square of black lace over her head and tie it under her chin, but this morning she forgot and tottered downstairs without it; and when she arrived in the drawing-room she was received by Ursula with a derisive laugh and an order to look at herself in the glass, and see what a boyish fright she was. Poor Connie would have blushed if she could, as it was she only trembled and turned to go back in search of her missing head-tire with the weak tears glittering in her eyes again.

But Miss Pegge Burnell stopped her and bade her never mind the handkerchief, the short curls

were prettier, and then she packed her in amongst soft sofa cushions and made her cosy in the highest degree near her favourite window, pulled her own easy chair up beside her and began to make a little quiet conversation.

All went on smoothly until the old lady bethought her of my letter, when she asked, "Oh, my dear, and what does Doris say? Any good news from Redcross?"

"I have had no letter," Connie replied.

"Yes, my pet, I took it out of the bag myself, and sent Ursula up with it." As Miss Pegge Burnell spoke she darted a suspicious glance at Ursula, the purple suffusion of whose face betrayed her guilt.

Connie looked at her too and said, "Give me my letter, Ursula; why do you keep it from me?"

Ursula turned on her heel and marched up to the piano, replying coolly, "There was nothing in it but what would have put you into one of your moods, so I exercised my discretion and burnt it."

"You burnt my letter from Doris without

letting me read it?" cried Connie, tremulous with anger.

"Yes, and there was an end of it."

Connie burst into a passion of tears. She had counted on that letter for three days; she wanted a crumb of comfort; it would have done her good; her heart and spirit were giving way again for need of them. Oh! how could Ursie be so cruel to her? "Let me go," sobbed she, escaping from Miss Pegge Burnell's gentle restraint, "let me go, I cannot bear it!" and she half ran, half stumbled from the room to take refuge in solitude once more.

Ursula expected a tirade from Miss Pegge Burnell when she was gone, and prepared to defend herself, but the old lady did not speak or even look at her. She sat gazing out at the sunshine with her brows contracted and her hawk's eyes preternaturally bright, but her lips were compressed and promised nothing pleasant should she change her mood and open them: so after lounging several times between the table and the piano, making a feint of doing several things, but ultimately doing nothing, Ursula

slipped quietly away and followed her unhappy sister.

Connie had seated herself upon the floor with her head against the low window-sill, and her passionate grief was not exhausted yet; but Ursula, instead of being touched, was only enraged, and according to her invariable practice of proving herself right in what she had done, she said harshly, "You need not make all this ado about nothing, Connie; you were sent from home under my care, and I shall always use my discretion as to what letters are proper for you to read. How do I know who may write to you?"

"You ought not to have destroyed Doris's letter; you saw how I have longed for it. You make me feel more wicked and miserable than ever!" gasped poor Connie.

"I can't help it; say what you like, it will make no change in me. I shall act just the same as if you were sensible and grateful for my kindness," returned Ursula with lofty serenity.

"You are my worst enemy!" cried Connie with sudden fire; "no one is so cruel to me as you!"

"I wish you heard what other people say about you when you are not there and then you would speak differently," retorted Ursula; "though Doris and mamma profess to believe you more sinned against than sinning, and though Mrs. Maurice and a few others give you encouragement, what do they *really* think?" and she turned upon her cowering victim with a malicious, sarcastic laugh. Connie checked her tears and looked at her sister, but the agonized appeal of her wild eyes was lost on Ursula, for she was now launched on another tributary stream of lies, and her tongue went with its tide. "Yes, what do they *really* think?" she repeated; "they may hide it from *you*, but they can't deceive *me*, or make *me* affect their spurious charity. No, you have been a vain, foolish, flirty, artful girl, and from me you shall have the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and you ought to feel thankful for my sincerity instead of abusing me. I should have thought Dr. Julius Eden's treatment might have convinced you that you are an object of *utter scorn* to him and everybody else, though, of course, your own family, how-

ever angry they may be, must make the best of you, but we all feel *bitterly* how you have *disgraced* us."

While Ursula was speaking, Connie had risen to her feet, moaning, "There's no hope in the world! I wish I could die! I wish I could die!"

"Those flights don't impose upon me," sneered Ursula; "*wish you could die*, indeed! and where do you suppose you would go to if you died now? You had much better live and learn to redeem yourself, though Doris, who you fancy loves you so precious, did say it would be a blessing if it would please God to take you. Yes, I heard her with my own ears say it would be a blessing and a mercy if it would please God to take you, and mamma heard her and said so too."

With a cry torn up from the very roots of her heart, Connie cast herself prone upon the floor and lay there at Ursula's feet, beating the ground in her transports of anguish. Perhaps Ursula was rather alarmed at these effects of her oratory, for she began in a tone of vexed persuasion to urge her to be quiet, to get up, and not behave herself like a person bereft of

her senses; but Connie answered her never a word and lay moaning, incessantly moaning, like one who is conscious of nothing but an exquisite pain.

“Well!” cried Ursula at last, exasperation getting the better of her brief compunction, “if you will not hear reason, I shall leave you until you come to yourself, and can look and speak like an accountable being.” And away she went accordingly, feeling herself much aggrieved by the violence and extravagance of her sister’s passion, for in her own eloquent rage she had quite lost sight of what had given cause to it.

Poor Connie continued to lie there with her face to the ground, prostrated in spirit even more than in body. Ursula had cruelly and shamefully lied away the last hope that sustained her, but she had lied so like the truth that every word had gone home to its mark and every sting had pierced to the quick. How could she endure to live under such an intolerable load of shame? If mamma and Doris in their secret hearts were against her, who could be for her? Oh! that she could die and be forgotten! If they had no

faith in her they could not go on loving her as they had done, and when she was strong and able to bear it, perhaps they might be harsh to her as Ursula was. She should not have any one to cling to in all the wide, wide world, and it would be, as Doris said, a mercy and a blessing if God would take her!

That thought plucked her up from the floor and set her on her feet with a sort of desperate defiance—there was escape—there was escape out of all this desolation and pain—the dark, dark water—a broken heart would lie very still under that deep dark water—it was drawing her swiftly, swiftly—she felt it round her swaying heavily like a pall, and now it had gone over her head and she was lying under it at rest, at rest for ever!

Ah, no! It was the mere trick of a swooning fancy! She passed her hand across her eyes and found herself standing in the midst of the familiar room before the window which Ursula had thrown wide open; the sun was streaming in with a glow and fragrance that only made her misery the more insufferable, and in the sight

of the clear heaven she cringed down helplessly before the evil dream that had crept again into her soul. No one loved her, no one had faith in her any more, Ursula mocked her, to Julius she was become an object of utter scorn, Doris and mamma would rather she had died than lived—there was no hope, no peace, no pity anywhere! If only *one* had been on her side she could have lived and lived the bitter slander down, but Ursula had snatched away her last support and she was quite alone!

There went wandering up and down in her mind pitiful, broken recollections of what her young life had been, how happy, how harmless and caressed till now. It was as if a lamb, tenderly sheltered and nurtured, were turned adrift on the hills in a tempestuous, winterly night, without dam, or shepherd, or companion, and left in the storm to perish unless God cared for it.

Unless God cared for it? The poor child had lost that holdfast too—Ursula had wrenched out of her feeble hands even her new-born trust in her merciful Father in Heaven; as she gazed with obscured eyes into the cloudless blue, she felt

as if He had forgotten her and left her to herself. She had begun to take comfort in Mrs. Maurice's kind words, "We all love you, dear Connie, and even did we not, you know there is One who never forsakes those who put their trust in Him." But she did not put her trust in Him now; something whispered persistently that it was of *no use*. She had done her best; she had tried to bear patiently what had been given her to bear, only asking that mamma and Doris should believe and be good to her, and Ursula said they thought no better of her than others did—no better than Mrs. Peacocke, who had turned her back on her, or than Julius who had put her away as unworthy of the love which had been the very joy and perfection of her life.

Look where she would, on earth there was no hope for her any more.

To die. She had a timid shrinking from pain, though she had borne so much of it. She crouched up into the window-seat, and the sunshine poured over her hands—the thin little hands with the clear blue veins, the clear blue veins in the slender white wrists, the sunshine made them more clear,

more delicately transparent. There had been a story in her Roman History of some woman who had killed herself by opening a vein, and bleeding to death—there could be no long agony in that; was her name Cherea? No, memory was playing her false; she could not recollect—yet surely it was a woman—Chearea. It was gone—her mind was a blank. *She laughed.* The sound mocked her as if it had been a taunt of Ursula's, and her bitter pain smote her after it more keenly.

She always carried in her dress pocket a pen-knife with a handle of mother-o'-pearl that long ago, when she was quite little in the school-room at Roseberry, papa had given her for a birthday present. She began to play with it, to toy with it over her wrists; it was very safe, poor soul, it never would cut, and old age and slate-pencils had not sharpened the tiny blade; she felt as if she were mocking herself, but the idle act brought death into her presence, and overshadowed her with his black wings. Again that dark water swaying and heaving around her, washing up to her lips, stifling her breath—but an angel of God was there standing patient with

outstretched hand to help and save; she looked up, chilled and shivering, and with a wild terror in her eyes, cast the harmless tool from her, and dropt upon her knees as to a visible presence of Mercy, and prayed with floods of tears that the evil thought of her heart might be forgiven her and taken away.

When Ursula came upstairs again, it was to prepare for a drive with Miss Pegge Burnell. Connie was still in her attitude of humiliation, and the poor soul did not see the look of contempt darted at her, or hear her sister ask if she were disposed to go out in the carriage; she was unconscious of all external things, conscious only that she had dreamt a monstrous wickedness, and that the omniscient power of good had saved her from herself.

Presently she grew quiet and rose trembling, but those few hours of excitement had changed her painfully, and though the passion was over, the effects of Ursula's cruel lies remained. The sense of shame unmerited scorched her. She would hide herself from the eyes of every one but God, who knew her innocence; she would

take herself away from those who said she had disgraced them, and try to lead a new life humbly, far off, where no one knew her sorrowful history. She could not die yet, her time was not God's time, and she must endeavour to be patient. But the pride was beaten out of her; it was no more the thought of making her unfriends reverse their sentence against her, or of convincing Julius he had done her a cruel wrong: the revulsion of melancholy had followed close on the violence of temptation; it was of no use to strive and struggle; all she could do henceforth was to suffer and be still.

The first sign of her lost hope and courage was her steady refusal to go downstairs again. She would sit nowhere but in that sunshiny window of her bedroom; she would not go into the garden for the ten minutes' stroll at noon; her appetite failed; her sweet face took an expression of dreary, soulless endurance. Ursula scolded and urged her in vain, she was met with passive obstinacy. Miss Pegge Burnell came up to her ten times a day, but her coaxing and entreaties failed equally; Harris petted her, the kind old

housekeeper wearied herself in devising dainties to tempt her to eat, but without success. Miss Pegge Burnell watched her with anxious scrutiny from day to day, saw the gloom deepening over her, and was persuaded that some great and mournful change had come over her spirit since the affair of my letter. It troubled her exceedingly. When she brought her to Southill the poor girl looked ill and frail indeed, but her eyes had a shining calm in them, and she would testify her gratitude for every little kindness. But now a dull heaviness had come over her countenance, a slight indifference, a negligent passivity, which were easy to interpret; her spirit, that had gained a little strength from the tender love at home, was once more broken and laid in the dust.

On the fourth morning from the beginning of this change, Miss Pegge Burnell sought Ursula, and took her to task for having destroyed my letter.

“And what did you say to the child besides?” demanded the old lady sharply.

“I said nothing to her,” replied Ursula.

That afternoon Miss Pegge Burnell wrote to

a very old friend whom she had at Port Harborough, a Dr. Evans, and begged him to come over to Southill on the morrow, which he did. He was a man distinguished for the treatment of mental disorders and for his benevolence in his profession, and to him, with the openness of intimate acquaintance, she poured out the deplorable history of Connie's sorrows and persecutions, mentioning more particularly the sudden depression of spirits which had ensued during the last few days. Dr. Evans naturally wished to see her; and Miss Pegge Burnell took him straight to her room without affording her an opportunity of evasion by sending a message beforehand.

Connie was sitting up in the window-seat as usual, bathed from head to foot in the hot sunshine; she did not turn her head at the opening of the door, and her whole attitude was nerveless and abandoned.

"I have brought a very dear old friend of mine to have a peep at you," said the old lady with assumed sprightliness; "he is wonderful for setting young folks like you up again when you have been ill."

At this Connie slowly moved her face round, and after looking at Dr. Evans with large dusky eyes for a moment, as slowly turned again to the contemplation of some leaves in her lap which she had gathered from the creepers round the window and picked to pieces.

“It is of no use,” said she; “I cannot get well in a day—I only wish to be left alone.”

“Don’t be uncivil, child!” exclaimed Miss Pegge Burnell, coming close to her, “and let me take off this black veil. Your hair will grow better without it, and it makes you look like a widow.”

Connie submitted, sighed, and went on tearing the leaves; she had stained her fingers yellow and purple with the sap, but she did not appear to care; her countenance, her voice, her manner were all expressive of utter dejection. Dr. Evans knew that look well; with her it was but a few days old, but its permanence would be insanity. He spoke to her kindly and persuasively, and she told him in reply that she did not want anything that she had not, and that there was no one whom she would like to have with her in preference to Ursula.

"Not your sister Doris?" asked he.

Connie said, "No."

"But she always suited you the best, and nursed you so well," interposed Miss Pegge Burnell.

"She does not care for me any more."

"Now, Connie, that is pure fancy—who put such an absurd notion into your head?"

"Ursula."

"We will cashier Ursula for a mischief-maker and a busybody. She burnt Doris's letter, but she could not say she did not care for you."

"Yes—Doris wished I were dead, and mamma wished it too."

"My pet, do you know what ridiculous trash you are uttering? you are losing your wits."

"Ursie said so—I am not mad—perhaps it would be happier if I were!"

"Ursula shall go home, and Doris shall come to you instead."

"No, I don't want Doris. If Ursula goes away I will have nurse; she loves me whether I am good or bad."

"But it would grieve Doris to see you distrust her after all her care, Connie."

"Would it? I wish I were dead, and out of the way of grieving any one again!"

This exclamation broke from her lips with passionate force, and she flung up her hands in a gesture of despair. Just at that moment in came Ursula, ruddy and warm after a vigorous walk, and demanded abruptly what was the matter? Dr. Evans deciphered her with his keen professional eye while Miss Pegge Burnell explained that he was a physician whom she had wished Connie to see.

"For," added she, "since you deprived her of Doris's letter she has been falling back instead of recovering."

"If she is going to make such a fuss and worry about that miserable letter, there it is," cried Ursula; "take it!" and pulling the crushed document out of her pocket, she threw it pettishly into Connie's lap amongst the broken leaves. She quite forgot to make her lies consistent, but the next moment she remembered having first asserted that she had burnt the letter, so in addition to

the original cruelty, there was betrayed her cold persistence in it through four days in sight of her sister's misery.

Connie snatched up the letter with a cry, and in attempting to straighten the paper, she tore it, but she would not suffer it to be taken out of her tremulous fingers and done for her. Dr. Evans observed her for a moment, and saw her eyes lighten, then he glanced at Ursula with her face of puffed contempt, and followed Miss Pegge Burnell from the room.

Alone with her in the library, he gave his opinion. He said the young woman Ursula was responsible for much mischief; he feared she had a scourging tongue, and a wicked little demon of jealous spite, always tempting her to torture her poor sister, for whom she had, justly or unjustly, conceived an aversion of the extent of which she was herself probably unaware. It was no delusion of which Connie had got hold, but a distinct idea founded on what had been said to her. All that was most sensitive in her had been mercilessly outraged; and the impression that those she loved regarded her as their dis-

grace was so deep bitten into her heart that it would urge her more and more into solitude, unless its cause could be removed. He told Miss Pegge Burnell that she must do her utmost to reassure her of the respect and affection of those whose good opinion was essential to her peace, advised that the nurse to whom she seemed so much attached should be sent for, and suggested the propriety of leaving her with Ursula as little as possible.

When Dr. Evans was gone the old lady returned to her charge, and found her undergoing another flagellation from Ursula's tongue. She bade her leave the room, and then poor Connie gave her my letter to read, saying disconsolately, "You would not think from that Doris wishes I were dead, would you?"

Miss Pegge Burnell assured her of course, not; Doris did nothing but love her, and never would do anything but love her, nor mamma, nor papa neither. "And, my pet, you must not let any absurd notion to the contrary get hold of you," added she; "for it is very grievous to be mistrusted by any one for whom we would cheerfully

lay down our life, and that is Doris's feeling for you. It was the dearest wish of her heart to see you happy, and as for anybody having a disrespect for you, it is all nonsense, and worse—it is lies. Perhaps you were a little goose, but that is the unkindest word any one says about you, and those were most to blame who let you risk the danger. You may hold up your head, and look us all in the face as frankly as ever; innocence was your best safeguard before, and it will be your best defence now. Dr. Julius never doubted that—he was angry at your want of confidence in him, which is a very different thing indeed. There! I have made a speech as long as Ursula, kiss me, and cheer up.”

Connie obeyed in part, there was a break in the clouds once more, and her heart expanded to the rays of comfort shed through it. Miss Pegge Burnell perceived the promising change, and said again, “I am going to write six lines to them at home before post about you. Ursula is too much for my patience, and either nurse or Doris must come and take her place. Now, Connie, which is it to be?”

“Doris.”

“That’s a dear, good little soul ; trust Doris’s love, and bury Ursula’s lies straightway.”

After this Connie lay down and slept, and when she woke again those about her saw that she was herself once more, and that the evil spirit of distrust had been cast out.

V.

ENDURING.

THE next morning's post brought me a long ditty from Ursula, which it is unnecessary to repeat, and also the following note from Miss Pegge Burnell:—

“DEAR DORIS,—

“You must come to Connie and send Ursula off, or Southill will do the poor child no good. I see Ursula is writing you a voluminous despatch, and so I will refrain from details, only begging you to make every allowance for the licence of her epistolary style. She would make a capital dragon, but she is a terrible companion for a bruised spirit; she would worry the soul out of a flint. If I were ill I would rather entrust myself to the Christian mercies of my big mastiff Cracker than to hers. Her voice alone is

enough to knock a weak person off her legs, and her step and way of banging doors fill this great old house with a ceaseless tempest of echoes. You will be sadly disappointed when you see Connie, and therefore I warn you she does not look as well as when she left you, but we hope there is no permanent mischief; Ursula's letter will furnish you with explanatory causes. Come over with as little delay as possible, there is need of you; or if by any chance you cannot be spared send nurse Bradshaw."

I could be spared, however, and setting off that day, I brought Connie home the next. That was her desire; she had experienced such depth of suffering at Southill that she longed to escape from it, and Miss Pegge Burnell acquiesced in her departure as probably the wisest measure. Ursula returned home with us, but at the week's end she had to go back to Erlstone, to my sensible relief; for in the interval she did little but plume herself on her own austere goodness, and rail at Connie's senseless perversity or my weak-minded encouragement of it.

When papa, mamma, nurse and I had the little one to ourselves again, the days slipt by with quiet composure. From morning till night there was seldom a voice heard in the house above a whisper. Connie's weakness still disabled her from any occupation, and it was not often we could persuade her out into the garden. Our friends and acquaintance came and went as usual, but their visits seemed to cause her neither pleasure nor disturbance.

It was a slow, monotonous, dreary interval, but as summer declined to autumn her strength grew and she was able to move about again as formerly; then it was that the change in her became apparent. Insensibly we ceased to call her the *little one* and the *child*, for the radiant, happy beauty and the blithe voice which had been like sunshine and song in our home were departed from her. I hardly know how to express it, but she appeared to have issued out of her great anguish calmed and purified and with the spirit of a perfect woman in her. I never knew her more gentle or more loving; to the past she had quite ceased to make allusion, and only in her steady clinging

to the shelter of home did she betray her dread of a renewed intercourse with the little world outside its walls. She was always sensitive to a cold look or a hard word, and though in some measure the effect of Ursula's splenetic and cruel assertions had worn off her mind, she had not forgotten them, and to my regret she acted in certain instances as if they might have been true. I would not appear to observe it, but occasionally she testified a little distrust of mamma and of myself, and both of us were aware that she liked nurse's watchfulness better than ours when she was most sad. However false a falsehood may be, there is always a difficulty in effacing the stain where it has fallen.

By degrees her mind returned to her clear and full, and as her physical energy increased the vapours that clouded her spirit cleared away; but the natural reserve of her character had never been more conspicuous than it was at this period. We sat together for many an hour without exchanging a single word; it seemed to be tacitly agreed between us that the past should be left to itself. It was less easy now to give her counsel or

consolation than it had been when she was weak and dependent; even Mrs. Maurice ceased from direct advice and contented herself with being quietly kind and affectionate to her. I remember that good woman saying to me one day, "Connie has felt and suffered beyond the common lot of women, and it seems to me that more than common strength is being infused into her spirit to enable her to bear up against it. Rely on it, my dear, she will be a better and nobler woman for her fiery ordeal; she is not of the kind who are soured or embittered by a great sorrow or a great wrong."

I believed Mrs. Maurice to be right. When I looked at Connie's face I saw a sweet, shadowed beauty leaning over a book or a trifling task of work, perfectly calm, steadfast and pure; long before she spoke of it, I have no doubt that her plan for her future life was shaped and matured, and that during her fits of silent abstraction she was nerving her heart and mind with the courage needful for its prosecution and success. She had found out, poor soul, that there are certain efforts which must be made *alone*, as there are solitary bitternesses and joys with which none may inter-

meddle. "God fulfils Himself in many ways," and perhaps He has decreed that in our extremity human help shall be so worthless or impossible that we *must* look to Him; whatever love and comfort we have around us, there are some pangs and some struggles which remain a secret between Him and our own soul for ever and ever.

October was come and nearly gone before Connie was persuaded to set foot beyond the garden walks. But one Sunday morning the weather was brilliant and warm as a memory of July, and as the church bells began to ring papa said to her, "Connie, if you will go to prayers I will; mamma has been hinting upstairs that it is just the day for both of us, and I think we ought to try."

"Very well, papa," was her answer, and she accompanied me to our room forthwith to prepare.

I thought it wiser to make no remark and she made none either, but quietly dressed herself as if in the prosecution of an ordinary custom, and being ready first she went into the garden and paced about until we joined her.

We were rather late in entering the church, and our pew being near the reading-desk we had to pass nearly all our friends before we reached it, and, but that Connie was looking down she would have had to respond to a multitude of congratulatory smiles and nods. She took her own old seat—by a forget I think—but having taken she would not change it, though it placed her face to face with Dr. Julius Eden. There he was, as usual; I saw him without looking towards him, and I saw too, in some unconscious way, that he was regarding Connie. I ought not have carried such thoughts to church with me, but I could not help it.

He had beheld her but twice since they parted the night before she went to Combe. *Then* she was full of happy, tender beauty, all light, glow, joy and hope—an innocent, childish soul loving him above all the world; now she had a holy, sweet, pallid loveliness touching as the face of one dead who has been inexpressibly dear. It was not the blithe Connie he had taken into his heart and cast out to live or to perish as God might allow, but a woman who had endured a passionate

anguish and left the joy of her youth amongst its burning embers. As I watched the drooping head and felt her beside me quivering to her very finger-tips, I had need to remember the conditions of Christian charity to forgive Dr. Julius even in that time and place; and it was not genuine forgiveness after all, for I hoped that the sight of her struck him with remorse. And I think it did. Once during the sermon I looked directly towards him and found his gaze upon her; and if I can interpret the expression of a face at all there was in his mind at that moment a most bitter regret. And well there might be; he had thrown away the chance of a happy life, and yet he had no more ceased to love our Connie than she had ceased to love him; of this I was fully convinced when for an instant our eyes met, lingered and fell each before the other sadly and unhope-fully.

When we left the church he had disappeared, but there was a shower of friendly greetings for Connie, which blunt Miss Martha Maurice interrupted by exclaiming in a circular way, "I am going to take her home, I shall not have her tired;

she has done enough for one day, and you can go and see her to-morrow," and drawing Connie's unresisting hand through her arm, she piloted her off across the Old Grove Fields in the wake of papa and mamma, and left me to receive and answer all inquiries.

The longer I live the more persuaded am I that the natural instinct of ordinary men and women is an instinct of kindness, unless there be some strong personal jealousy to pervert it. If Connie had belonged to our friends and acquaintance as she belonged to us, they could hardly have expressed more pleasure than they did at seeing her about again, and I perceived no risk[for] her now of unkind words or looks from any quarter. I wish the world always followed its generous impulses in the same way.

We did not talk about it, Connie and I, but we both felt that she had entered that day on a new era in her life, and that there could be no retreat from it. Whatever the future presented, she must do and endure as other women have done and endured, since sorrow and disappointment came into the world. I had no longer any fear

for her; her lot might be difficult, but she had drawn it and would bear it nobly; she had survived the storm, and though frequent clouds might return after the rain they would never be so dark and close any more as to shut out heaven, whence her strength and safety had come in the time of her sorest need.

VI.

MR. WESTMORE.

IN detailing Connie's trials I appear almost to have lost sight of my friend Mr. Westmore, but I had not really done so. I had seen him at intervals through the summer, when he had many pupils, and when, having at last yielded to Mr. Simeon Moore's representations and accepted the editorship of the *Scarcliffe Gazette*, he was much more fully occupied than formerly.

This newspaper was taken at every respectable house in the neighbourhood, and its editor was in some sort become a public character, sufficiently distinguished to have his enemies and opponents. The story of his father's calamities had been discovered, and Miss Cranmer, who in the pursuit of social knowledge was perfectly unscrupulous and indefatigable, never rested until, as she said,

she “had ferreted out all how and about it.” A certain old lady, once amongst the Westmores’ friends, who had come to Scarecliffe for change of air, was the person from whom she had elicited her correct edition, which she afterwards circulated from house to house with untiring assiduity, until it became a fact universally known and discussed.

Mrs. Westmore was safe from contumely; no one went near the cottage but myself; her son, however, by reason of his office, was brought into contact with many persons who, without a word spoken, still contrived maliciously to intimate that they were in possession of unpleasant facts concerning him. He had to endure many a stealthy insult, and while he held his peace to his mother, he took frequent counsel with me, evidently regretting that he had ever suffered himself to be drawn out of his cherished solitude. I was fired with indignation on his behalf, but still I could not be altogether sorry that he had returned to the wholesome contest of active life, for they had roused the dormant spirit of a man in him; and if he were now and then more miser-

able than formerly, as a rule he was only more cheerful and hopeful.

If I said they were cowards beneath contempt who stabbed him for his father's faults, he smiled at my wrath, and one day when I had indulged in a little lament that the best and wisest amongst men are not invulnerable to the stings of spite and cruelty that lurk in malignant and idle tongues, he answered me thus: "You revolt against baseness and uncharity as if you had never heard their names before, whereas they are to be met in divers fine disguises, walking about the world everywhere. For a little while I have hid myself out of their way successfully, but they are like bloodhounds for hanging on a poor fugitive's track, and have run me to bay again, but this time I will stand frontwise and show my teeth."

I applauded his resolve, and said that through evil report and good report the friends who once learnt to know him would be his friends always.

He shook his head, and replied that he had not found it so. "My misfortunes are not picturesque," were his words. "God knows they have been tragical enough in their consequences,

but a mean, degrading source of trouble taints the trouble itself with meanness."

It was only a few days after this that, coming down to breakfast with Connie, I found lying on the table a freshly folded newspaper, damp from the press, and on opening it I saw the name of a publication which had lately been advertised to start in rivalry of the *Gazette*. The *Universal News* was its ambitious title. By way of making known its merits, the first number had that morning been dropped at every house in and about Scarccliffe—at ours amongst the rest. As a matter of course I looked into it, but having skimmed two puffy leaders on public affairs, a brief article also in large type caught my eye.

This article began with an allusion to its *moribund contemporary*, as it designated the old-established paper, and after a flourish about the superior way in which the *Universal News* proposed to contribute to the enlightenment of the reading public, it went on in a strain of insolent and cowardly comment to perform the *Gazette's* funeral obsequies. Perhaps it was a clever expedient to feign its rival dead or dying, as it

aspired to that rival's vacated seat of honour, but in fact, at the moment, the *Universal News* was writing its elegy, the *Gazette* was in full possession of its subscribers' confidence, and a better-paying speculation than it had been at any previous period of its existence.

At the time, however, I either knew or thought nothing about the tangible prosperity of Mr. Westmore's paper, though as I perused the malicious covert insinuations against him of which I understood the interpretation but too well, my spirit rose insurgent against the coarse injustice. He would see this article, atrocious in its stealthy malignity—and necessarily this public revival of his family disgrace must wound him cruelly; human hearts are never impervious to such attacks unless all sense of shame be dead within them. I sat thinking about it, shredding the odious paper into bits for long after; now wishing I were near him to reason away the first asperity of the pain, then reflecting that it was better not, for solitude might be his ablest counsellor.

I attributed to him a phase of entirely feminine sentiments; I imagined him feeling the same tor-

tures of helpless shame as I might myself have felt under the same circumstances. Not for a moment did I figure to my fancy the natural man, roused by the scoffs spat upon his father's grave, and the slanders against his blameless mother and himself, walking off to Scarccliffe in a fury with a tough crabstick in his grasp, catching the villanous editor of the *Universal News* issuing from the door of the publishing office, and belabouring him until his soul became as water, and he roared for help and mercy while the street rang again. Nevertheless this was what the student and philosopher did, and the exercise, wholesome and exhilarating, as under those circumstances it could not fail to be, kindled up in him some of the embers of his ancient fire. With the flush and enjoyment of his vengeance upon him, he shortly afterwards presented himself before me. I was still inwardly mourning and feeling for him, when he came swiftly into the drawing-room; his head up, eyes sparkling, nostril quickened—almost a stranger to me, in fact. In a few minutes I was in possession of all the particulars of his late exploit, and much admired it.

“It was what every man of spirit would have done under the same provocation,” said I cheerfully, “and I am glad you did it, though at the first blush it sounds rather Irish.”

“Does it? Well, there is Irish blood in me—my mother is of a Tipperary family. I feel as if the salutary exercise of my strength on Mr. Topham’s back had worked much unnecessary sentiment out of me.”

I laughed and said, “If you could beat an enemy every day, then it might be expected to act on you as a moral tonic. I believe the fighting element is essential to success in life.”

“It is needful for the preservation of peace,” was the paradoxical reply.

This warlike demonstration on the part of Mr. Westmore was the town’s talk in Scarcliffe and Redcross for many days of course. Such an event does not often occur to disturb the monotonous flow of country life; and public opinion, as is not unusual, went with the stronger. Mr. Westmore found himself generally commended, for, as it happened, he could not have chastised a more unpopular character than the pettifogging

lawyer who had been selected as editor by the projectors of the *Universal News*. People in general said he was not to be blamed for his father's crime, and magnanimously forgave him it; but the fact of its notoriety remained, and his sensitiveness to such notoriety remained also. Even an invitation to dine with Mayor Colson and meet his sympathizers could not harden his feelings into feigned indifference, and the heat of the occasion having evaporated, his sudden bombast of courage began to evaporate too, and the calm philosopher was himself again—that is, physically indolent, morally quiescent, mentally active to restlessness. Who can account for the revulsion? His mother and I grieved over it, remonstrated, urged, even reproached him, but without effect. “Habit,” said he, “is ten times nature,” and gave up the strife by relinquishing his editorship of the *Gazette*.

It was during the disappointment of this return to his old customs of seclusion that I did a thing which most practical persons will characterize as a piece of romantic folly. I cannot help it—it was a consolation to myself, and I only regretted

not having done it earlier, when I discovered amongst my uncle Sibthorpe's papers those letters from the elder Mr. Westmore which I afterwards gave to his widow. I wrote to my brother Anthony out in Australia, and after giving him an outline of the story as I believed it, I begged him to try and discover whether the man Halbutt was still living, and if so, whether anything could be done with him in the way of extracting a confession. I told no one then but Connie, who sympathized heartily, and during the tedious later months of her recovery it was that I waited for an answer which I knew could not reach me at the earliest until after the next Christmas was turned. Before it came I had, however, mentioned the step I had taken to Mrs. Westmore, who also told her son, and though we all professed ourselves more or less unhopeful, I am sure some of us hoped, and hoped confidently too.

VII.

AN EFFORT.

It was about midway in November, that a letter came to us from Ursula, in which, after the usual desultory gossip over her own little affairs, she asked the plain question, — “Has Connie begun to look out for another situation yet?”

Connie had not, for both papa and mamma set their faces stedfastly against any such measure as quite unnecessary. It *was* unnecessary in some respects, but Mr. Peacocke had intimated to me privately that an occupation which would interest, without over-wearying her mind, would do her all the good in the world. I was of the same opinion, and Connie was only waiting for strength enough to undertake the

task before looking out for it. But this letter prompted her to immediate inquiries.

“I will find something to do before Ursie comes home for her Christmas holidays; don’t gainsay me, Doris,—I must,” said she, and when papa and mamma attempted to remonstrate, she just begged them to let her have her own way. “I am strong now, and I shall be happier with regular work to do,” was her plea, and after a little quiet talk over the matter in her absence we came to the final conclusion that she was probably in the right.

Our friends in Redcross knew of her intentions, and when we told the parsonage family that she now felt herself fit to engage in teaching, and asked them to bear her wants in mind, in case they heard of any one who required a daily governess, Mrs. Maurice promised her every assistance, and a few days after sent a message to ask her to go up to luncheon to meet Mrs. Surtees, wife of the Rector of Scarcliffe new church, who was seeking a teacher for her three little children.

Poor Connie tried to be brave, but she was

very white and tremulous all the time I helped her to dress, and seeing how she felt it, I would even then have gladly had her relinquish her plan, but when I suggested that she should give it up, she shook her head, and said, No—she might look weak and fearful, but in her heart she was resolved and strong enough; and that I could believe. Physical nervousness and confusion are not always tests of a wavering will or a weak mind, and though her former elasticity of health was not there, she possessed her soul again in full calm and clearness.

She went to the rectory alone, and returning just before dusk, told me with a satisfaction that was almost cheerful that Mrs. Surtees had engaged her as daily governess, from the beginning of the following week.

“So soon!” I cried.

“Yes, dear Doris; it is best not to think long about it since I have resolved to do it.”

“I wish it had been summer instead of winter coming on. It is a long walk into Scarcliffe in bad weather. I hope papa will not fret about it, but I am more than afraid.”

“You must prevent that by making light of difficulties, and disagreeables yourself. I don’t care for frost and snow, wind and rain.” Poor thing, no! she had suffered greater hardships than those! “And the hours are not too long,” she continued; “I must be there by half-past nine, and as I shall leave at half-past three, I can always be at home before dark.”

“If you could not I am sure papa would never hear of your going at all! Well, if it is to be we will make the best of it, and there is always this to fall back on, Connie—if you do not like it or find the work too hard there is no *necessity* to go on with it.”

“I don’t think trifles will prevail against me now. I shall set my mind to my task as Ursie does, and in time, no doubt, it will interest me as it does her. I don’t know whether I shall be a good teacher, but I love children, and therefore I hope I cannot go far wrong. Mrs. Surtees seemed very kind and disposed to like me. There are to be no Christmas holidays, and I am glad of it—I would rather not have any

break from my work until I am used to it. Don't look sad, Doris."

But I could not help looking sad—my heart and my hopes had been so bound up in my dear little sister, that I would fain have enacted the part of a special providence over her, and have shielded her from every care and hardship, and when I found that I could not do so—that her portion of sweet and bitter must come direct from the hand of the All-wise, and be accepted like the portion of others quite indifferent to me—I felt disappointed and regretful. When we talked to papa and mamma they looked sad too, but they gave up remonstrance, and even encouraged Connie now that her plan was ready for execution, and all our friends, for our sake, made a point of viewing it in its best light.

"It is not an unpleasant life, having a home to go to in the evenings," said Miss Kitty Layel to her. "I would rather work than not, being a single woman. I am fond of children, and I like teaching, but what I do *not* like is living in other people's houses, and that, as daily

governesses, we escape, and preserve our independence."

Ursula answered the intelligence of Connie's engagement with the remark that, for her part, she always had thought, and always should think, daily-governessing *low*. She could not imagine any young woman voluntarily trapesing the streets in all weathers, when she might live comfortably in a family. But she supposed Connie had her sufficient motives into which she should not seek to pry.

Certainly Connie had her motives, but they were by no means such as Ursie would have insinuated. She had a natural clinging to the affection of home, but if those whose presence *made her home* would have left Redcross and gone elsewhere, gladly would she too have abandoned the scene of her bitter sufferings. We had some talk with mamma about leaving Grove Cottage when our lease expired, but papa, on its being named to him, said so disconsolately that he hoped never to move again until he was carried to his last home, that the idea was at once and finally abandoned. Though Connie never said

so, I know that from the time she began to go out the dread of meeting Dr. Julius Eden haunted her perpetually. His name had not been mentioned before her, so far as I am aware, since the time of her return from Southill, but it would be too much to say that he was banished from her thoughts. Indeed, there was evidence enough to the contrary for any one accustomed to notice the signs of a preoccupied imagination. Poor soul! I could not blame her. He had used her hardly enough, but she had loved him too well to unlove him all at once; her best chance of forgetfulness lay in the slow friction and wear of time, which, if it cannot obliterate, can at least dim a fond or a painful memory.

I often think how weak and foolish we must be, to allow trifles to influence us so painfully as they do when our minds are made up to much greater evils. Connie was to go out as a daily teacher—to that we had agreed and were resigned, though we disliked it; but when the Monday morning arrived on which she was to walk into Scarcliffe to her duties for the first time, we all felt deeply and unreasonably depressed

because there was a thick mist and drizzling rain for her to go through.

She laughed at our condolences, but all her laughing could not moderate her own nervous heart-throbs, or quite repress the quiver on her lips when she said good-bye. It was only for the day, but it seemed somehow as if she were going a long way off. Papa watched her figure down the road from the staircase window until it disappeared in the mist, and though a word of querulous complaint from him was now exceedingly rare, he could not help lamenting a little that his darling should have come to *this*. The hardship of it seemed much greater to him than to any of us womankind, and nurse, overhearing some of his distressed remarks, came up with her cheerful philosophy, and after reminding us that Connie would be back to tea, suggested in reference to the rain, that as she was neither sugar nor salt, and would not melt, she would perhaps look all the better for being obliged to take a walk; a wholesome exertion to which ever since her illness she had been more or less averse.

And I think she did come back a little brighter. Her pupils—two girls of six and eight, and a little boy in petticoats and the alphabet—were very loveable children, she told us, and as happy and merry as crickets; and she was not too tired either to attend to her regular evening duty of reading *The Times* to papa, so that, in reality, the performance of her work proved less arduous than its promise. Soon its difficulties and annoyances disappeared altogether, or were no longer made any account of, and she dropt easily and gradually into the new course of her life, while we grew used to her absence through the day.

Ursula being at Erlstone and myself never very hardy, we became more of home-keepers than ever. Connie pleaded fatigue against ever going out when her day's work was done, and by Christmas time the monotony of our habits had worn so smoothly to us that it might have reigned in our house unbroken for years.

The most remarkable event that happened during this period was the addition to our establishment of a dog, named Dandy, an ugly but

honest fellow, whom Connie ransomed for the sum of one shilling from two boys who were commissioned to drown him. He became a very faithful and attached friend to all of us, and never displayed any naughty dispositions, except towards a white kitten of the fussy kind, which Miss Pegge Burnell presented to me, and that jealousy, quite beneath his canine dignity, in process of time he overcame. The kitten was my now estimable and venerable Cosy—once the merriest of its race, and inferior to none in beauty. I should be almost ashamed to say how many a ten minutes I spent admiring the graceful little animal, engaged in a velvet-footed fight with her own shadow before the glass doors of the chiffonier, or descending to a series of coquettish prankings which a morose philosopher might have watched with a salutary effect on his risible muscles. She was a vain, tyrannical little cat, but as great a pet as Miss Janet Layel's Tricksy, to whom, indeed, she was akin, and when Ursula arrived from Erlstone and found her in possession of a soft cushion and Dandy quite at home upon the rug, she exclaimed

that we had set up a regular old maid's menagerie which only wanted a parrot to make it complete ; and this she offered to purchase for us if we would accept it. But we declined the parrot, and were quite content with our four-footed favourites.

Pet animals are pleasant creatures, and their unsophisticated fondness is a great comfort, therefore I hope no one will quote me that tiresome, threadbare old truism about its being wrong to waste affection on them. Have you a dog, my friend ? I do not ask you to confess to me, but don't you—*don't* you like him ten times better than many of your acquaintance, and find him more sociable company ? I counted Dandy amongst my best friends. Who so quick at my call, so constant at my step as that ugly doggie ? Who so watchful and sympathetic of my varying moods ? Who so joyful at my caress, so forbearing, so unexacting, and so grateful ? His nature was a great puzzle to me. His eyes expressed such love, understanding and fidelity. If he could have spoken, I am sure he would have uttered nobler sentiments

than many dogs' masters have courage to utter in these days, when inverted language does duty for humour, and every virtue extant has its popular parody.

And Cosy merits a good word too—pretty, soft, nestling, frisking, selfish thing! I am not prepared to deny the selfishness of puss, but I maintain that it is a selfishness which can be borne with much better than the selfishness of some of our dear friends. Cosy loved cream, but she loved it best in my saucer; she loved sleep, but she slept nowhere so happily as in my lap; she loved to scratch and claw, but she preferred to scratch and claw me far beyond any other person or thing. Object that she was tyrannical and disturbed my naps in the long, darkling afternoons, by tickling my face with the whiskers that embellished her own mousy little visage, or frolicked over my book, or pounced on my pen, and I will admit it, but also I must add that I liked such evidences of her pretty presumption, and encouraged them. She is an old cat now, but still very cheerful, excellent company—as for Dandy, he, good dog, lies under the

great pear-tree in the garden, not sunning himself any more but under the sod, resting after an honourable and well-spent life. Surely there is somewhere a paradise of pets, and Dandy and I shall meet again! Ursula laughed at my fondness for these creatures, but I did not care—I think with Miss Janet Layel that we are only just achieving the true peace of life when we give up caring for being laughed at, whether in things great or small.

VIII.

PERSECUTION.

ON the eighteenth of December my sister Ursula came home for her holidays, and dull holidays she anticipated they would be. Of late months our showier acquaintance had limited their visits to calls at long intervals, and we were no longer included in their festive invitations of the season as formerly. This was a matter of rejoicing rather than of regret to me, but Ursula was considerably annoyed by what she took for a falling away of respect.

“It is clear to me,” she remarked with much vivacity on hearing of a party at Mrs. Willoughby’s to which none of us were asked; “perfectly clear that we are regarded as having taken a step down in the world since Connie and I went out as governesses. Well, I don’t care! I would not

exchange my honest work and independence for the Willoughby girls' flirting, lounging, and ten pounds a-year pocket-money, and yet that little doll of an Ethel quite looks down upon us."

Ursula was, however, in due time propitiated by an invitation from Miss Pegge Burnell to assist her in the decoration of a Christmas tree, and afterwards to take part in a dance round it which the hospitable old lady was going to give to a mixed party of children, mammas and governesses. Such elders as went were to make themselves useful, and to consider themselves as quite secondary in the entertainment, and with this intimation I also was asked.

"Connie will go with the little Surtees, I suppose?" Ursie remarked when the note had been read.

We were at tea, and Connie was sitting by, but she took no notice of the observation until it was put into the form of a direct interrogatory, when she said that if Mrs. Surtees required her to go she should, not without.

"Of course you will have to go, people do not keep governesses to be troubled with their chil-

dren themselves," [returned Ursula shortly, and Connie making no rejoinder, the subject dropt.

She and Ursula were very distant to each other, and never entered into sisterly conversation now; a habit of mutual avoidance was growing up between them fast, and to interfere was but to widen and perpetuate the breach. Ursula did not so often indulge her tongue at Connie's expense as formerly, but Connie had neither forgotten nor forgiven her unkindness at Southill and regarded her with a most complete distrust. It was a pity, and I would thankfully have seen them reconciled, but that was very unlikely to happen while Ursula upheld the righteousness and propriety of her own conduct throughout, and maintained against every proof to the contrary the reprehensible vanity and folly of poor Connie's. I had tried my powers as mediator several times already, but quite ineffectually, and I had now, therefore, ceased to plead with either; it was only breath wasted, until Ursula found courage and conscience enough to be honest and sincere, of which there were no present symptoms. She never would see, or at least admit, her own faults of hardness, but

in this particular case her insistence on Connie's blame after she was set right in every independent person's mind, was a cruel act of falsity not only against her sister, but also against her own soul. For Ursula no more believed that Connie had done wrong than did anybody else, but she *said* that she believed it—than which no lie could now have been more mischievously wicked.

In my great love for Connie, I could not now and then help giving way to my indignation, but Ursula bore it with raised eyebrows, a sarcastic smile, and a countenance as hard as a flint. She said, and acted up to it, that, having pronounced her opinion, nothing should or could make her go back from it; and her opinion was that Connie had been a vain, foolish, artful girl who had laid herself out to attract admiration, and had paid only the due penalty in the loss of *everybody's* respect.

In the face of the most convincing proofs to the contrary, Ursula averred with contemptuous significance that Connie had forfeited everybody's respect, and against a deliberate, resolute lie like that what argument could prevail? In vain I

pointed out our friends' kindness and attention to her—that was *pity*; or pleaded the fact of Mrs. Surtees having taken her to teach her children—that was because the Maurices had determined that she should have another chance.

The last debate we had on the subject Ursula closed with the following declaration:—

“Say what you like, and think what you like, Doris, but don't hope to change my views. I always predicted that something bad would happen when Connie was so petted and indulged, and I don't know what could have happened much worse than that she should have made herself a nine days' talk in such a place as Scarcliffe. The story will cling to her all the days of her life, just as that mysterious shadow which nobody can exactly define hangs about Miss Theodora Bousfield. The opinions of women and the behaviour of pious friends is no criterion for me. I look at Dr. Julius, and see how *he acted*—he thought her unfit to be his wife as an honourable man, and that is quite conclusive with me.”

I gave up then—if Ursula was determined to *profess* an evil opinion that reason, evidence, truth,

and her own conscience belied, it was quite certain that no pleas of mine would convert her ; but it is a fact to my distinct and perfect knowledge that she stood alone in her feigned condemnation of our sister.

Connie was quite aware that Ursula's sentiments had undergone no favourable change towards her since their quarrels at Southill, and it would have been almost unnatural if no resentment had burnt in her heart because of them. The remembrance of Ursula's detestable injustice and rancorous spite were not to be easily obliterated ; and they continued still, vehement though suppressed, betraying themselves in acrid tones and scornful glances, to which Connie opposed nothing but a weariful patience. Yet I have seen her steal out of the drawing-room after tea and go and sit upstairs in the cold many a time to escape the perpetual taunt of Ursula's manner, and I felt quite helpless for her. It was utterly useless to appeal to sympathy in Ursula, for she had no sympathy to be appealed to—nothing but a self-righteousness as unimpressible as the nether millstone.

On one point with regard to her I have since seen reason to change an opinion which I formed about the time when Dr. Julius' attachment to Connie first began to manifest itself. I have said elsewhere that I could not perceive any of those reasons for jealousy in Ursula which make women wilfully unjust to each other. I am convinced now that I was mistaken there. Ursula never *loved* Dr. Julius as I should speak of love, but her fancy was attracted to him, she coveted his admiration, and her overweening vanity was mortified to the quick by his negligence. In that state of feeling she watched him growing passionately fond of Connie, and against her, in that deep soil of angered disappointment, germinated, sprang up, and throve a secret hate, the strong fibres of which had interwoven themselves with all her motives inseparably, and, perhaps, imperceptibly.

It was with a feeling of triumphant satisfaction rather than of anything else, that she saw the cruel separation between Dr. Julius and Connie. She had no generosity, no greatness of heart, no noble passion—nothing but a cold, malignant, resolute desire to keep them apart, and this desire

it was that actuated her conduct now and later. I believe, too, that she had got beyond the point of self-deception, which had plausibly masked her earlier persecutions, and that she was bent with all her powers of will and anger to the one object of keeping asunder those whose hearts God had assuredly joined together.

A hope of forgiveness and reconciliation between them had secretly visited me now and again, but while Ursula was with us it became very vague and faint. She insisted so forcibly on the *unpardonableness* of Dr. Julius' treatment of Connie, even while she upheld its *justice*, that her emphasis overwhelmed my reason. It was in this and the manner of it that I detected her real but veiled feelings. Conventionality and rules of propriety had become a second nature to her, and suppressed all violence and outrage; but in less trained characters the deep-rooted jealous antipathy that swayed her was such as breaks loose in the wild licence of deadly crimes.

IX.

CHANCE MEETINGS.

THE night before Miss Pegge Burnell's Christmas-tree party, Connie appeared in the drawing-room with her solitary evening-dress of white muslin to retrim, and as she sat down to her task she quietly intimated to me that she should have to go to the Priory with her little scholars on the morrow, as Mrs. Surtees would not be able to do so. Ursula watched the progress of her work, in which she was not very skilful, with a sarcastic interest, and as it was coming to a conclusion she could not repress her customary sneer.

“Your love of the pomps and vanities is reviving, is it, Connie? That is a good sign. But don't you think those rose-coloured ribbons

will be very trying now that you have lost all your bloom?"

"Not by candlelight," replied Connie with the utmost simplicity or indifference.

Ursula delighted to insinuate at this time that Connie's beauty was quite washed and wasted away, than which nothing could be more obviously untrue. She was still as lovely as ever, though with a difference. Sorrow and sickness are not such beautifiers, in point of fact, as sentiment supposes, and she was, indeed, greatly changed from the gay and graceful little one of three Christmases ago; but come upon her what would of pain and suffering, she could never lose her perfection of form and feature, to which health was now fast restoring the rounded, swelling contours and delicate tints of youth. For my part, I thought her face sweeter than ever, and infinitely more noble in its expression of womanly dignity and tenderness than in its former sprightliness and roseate bloom.

As she was to go to Miss Pegge Burnell's party from the rectory in charge of the Surtees children, Ursula and I went up to the Priory alone. We found

a merry multitudinous gathering when we arrived, but Connie and her little flock were not yet come, so I seated myself near the door to wait and watch for her. Scarcely had I done this, when I perceived Mrs. Tom Claridge and her two girls, who drew near to inquire whether Connie was expected; and when I explained the reason of her delay, the poor lady said she was there herself chiefly in the anticipation of seeing my sister.

While Connie lay at the worst of her illness Mrs. Tom Claridge had been unremitting in her attentions, but having gone to town before she was able to come downstairs, they had never met since her hurried departure from Combe. I could not exactly tell what pleasure or profit was to accrue to either from an encounter now, and to Connie I feared it would prove a painful surprise, but it was then too late to avert it. There had been an exchange of letters between them, which had smoothed away offences, but I had neither wished nor expected that it should lead to a renewal of their personal intimacy, which I considered would have been better dropt, and, as far as possible, forgotten. Nothing now could

be good for my darling that tended to keep alive in her own mind, or that of other persons, the disastrous history of the last twelve months; and this meeting, which Mrs. Tom Claridge had so unwisely contrived, was quite sure to recall its most stinging and painful passages; but she was a woman of warm impulses, and possibly she thought that an open display of friendliness would make amends to Connie for previous wrong, and I therefore tried to give her credit for kind if mistaken intentions.

Connie and her trio were the last of the guests to arrive, and their appearance was the signal for a grand procession to the tea-table, pompously marshalled by Quennell; and in the bustling movement that ensued, I found my opportunity for whispering to her that Mrs. Tom Claridge and her children were present. She coloured, but, to my surprise, looked neither annoyed nor embarrassed, and when they shook hands, and the children clung round her with every demonstration of affection, she lost none of her self-possession. They sat side by side at tea, and conversed as unceasingly as their attention to the young

ones would admit; but still there was an air of constraint upon them, as if they were yielding obedience to a sense of duty rather than of pleasure, and were bent on testifying that whatever rumour might say, there was no animosity or ground of animosity between them. I was so sure of that already, that I could very well have dispensed with this public evidence of it, which my sister Ursula, for one onlooker, was determined to misinterpret. She watched them with critical scrutiny, and afterwards pronounced the display of mutual courtesy preposterous, though quite incapable of deceiving *her*. Mrs. Tom Claridge, she was persuaded, was acting under her husband's coercion, and Connie was taking a mean advantage of her weakness to put a gloss on their unfortunate relations, which might hoodwink our friends still more effectually and aid in the re-establishment of her own character. In every society there are a few persons who, of two motives, will always choose the meaner, and I am not sure that Ursula was alone in her sarcastic comments on this unexpected meeting. And there was yet more food for the idle gossips of

the gathering in store than even that abounding topic, and another effort for Connie to make in face of our little world of friends and well-wishers, indifferent acquaintance and curious strangers, which I would have done much to have her spared.

The Christmas-tree was for the present secluded behind the library doors from the bright and eager eyes of all the little people, whose joyous curiosity kept them in an incessant flutter, chatter and rustle; but it was understood that after the solemn business of tea was despatched, then the folding portals would be thrown open, and the grand act of the entertainment would begin. Before this could happen, however, Ursula and Miss Theodora Bousfield were mysteriously summoned from the table, and disappeared, as it was whispered, to help to light up the tree, which they had previously had the chief hand in decorating. Then a pause of awe and silence fell on us, to be dispersed by a renewed stream of prattle which flowed on more and more vociferously, until we all rose and trooped back into the great drawing-room, when it burst into one wild torrent of

enthusiasm, admiration and delight. The library doors being set wide open, full in the midst of the space appeared a perfectly formed spruce fir, aflame with coloured lamps from the lowest to the topmost branches, and richly fruited with gilded cones, brilliant toys and cornets of delicious sweetmeats. The clapping of tiny hands, and the applause of shrill voices in every tone of astonishment, awe and wonder, was as fine a chorus of Christmas music as mammas could wish to hear; but when the Scarcliffe brass band suddenly tuned up in a lively dance, and all the little feet joined in with a whirling prance round and about the glorious tree, I was thankful to be in the rear of the happy crowd, and to have a pair of hands free to cover my ears and soften the tumult.

While standing thus I felt myself smartly struck on the shoulder, and turning round I saw Ursula with a red, vexed face and an air of the most contemptuous disgust.

“Here is another nice surprise for Connie,” said she; “Dr. Julius Eden is in there,” pointing to the library. “It is a regularly got up thing, and

I am perfectly sickened! If Miss Pegge Burnell meant to ask him she ought to have told us; it is not very pleasant to be thrust into the company of a gentleman who has just jilted our sister. You can warn Connie if you like, and give her the chance of getting out of the way; she cannot possibly remain in the same room with him if she knows it."

I was truly dismayed myself, but I had no opportunity for interference, for Connie's little folks, in their impetuous curiosity, had dragged her into the library, and when I caught sight of her I knew at a glance that she and Dr. Julius were aware of each other's presence. I contrived to reach her where she was standing, white as marble, and almost as still, with a child clinging to each hand and utterly preventing all retreat. Dr. Julius was a little way off, holding a long wand with a lighted taper on the top, by means of which he had apparently kindled the upper lamps on the Christmas-tree. He was talking hurriedly to Miss Theodora Bousfield, but he made no signs of retiring from the noisy, merry scene.

I hoped that everybody was too busy amusing and controlling their respective charges to give much heed to anything else, and that Connie's icy pallor might thus escape the eyes of all save a very few. It is wonderful how soon the tragedy of our lives disappears from every memory but our own. When I intimated to Miss Pegge Burnell in what an awkward situation she had placed her favourite and my sister, the old lady exclaimed, with sudden compunction,—

“My dear, I assure you I never thought of it, or it should not have happened for the world! I will send him away.”

But Dr. Julius must have pleaded for permission to remain, as I saw him throughout the evening making himself useful, while Connie, under the dominion of her little scholars, past and present, was dragged, whether she would or no, into all their frolics. Children took to her naturally, and were rather exuberant in their displays of affection, but on my attempting her rescue she begged me to go away and leave her to them.

“I can bear them very well,” said she;

“but I cannot bear to be still and to be obliged to listen and talk.”

Having her young ones to look after she could not go away, and perhaps it was wisest to let the evening pass as if nothing untoward or unexpected had occurred.

When Ursula saw how quietly Connie supported what would have tried the strongest nerves, she again made her way to my place, and putting a powerful control over herself, appealed to my sense of decorum whether I thought this *right*? to which I had nothing to reply but that it was unpremeditated and could not be undone, and had better be allowed to pass as a matter of no importance. But my acquiescence in what I could not prevent was, nevertheless, extremely provoking to Ursula, who said that if Connie had feet to dance she supposed she had feet to go away, and that was what she ought to do, no matter who remarked on it.

“But the fact is,” she added sententiously, “that Connie has not a spark of proper pride or feminine delicacy. Any woman of genuine feeling would shrink from the sight of a man who had

cast her off with such scornful haste and indifference ; but I believe she lets the thought of him haunt her day and night, and that she is even rejoicing now that she is near him."

"She does not look much like rejoicing," said I, for at that moment she was full in our view, looking white but inexpressibly weary, though calm and self-controlled enough.

Meeting my eyes she smiled ; in some smiles there is more pathos than in tears, and that was one of them. I thought she was behaving beautifully under very trying circumstances, and I could not but admire the way in which, while shivering all through and ready to drop, she held up her head as if it were naught, and kept her place amongst the children with perfect dignity and serenity.

"It is a piece of consummate acting," sneered Ursula, in answer to some remark of mine ; "consummate acting, and *he* knows it, for he is not a bat or a mole, your Dr. Julius ! There is something absolutely improper in her remaining where she must inevitably meet him, unless she secludes herself altogether and gives up society.

She ought to leave Redcross for a year or two; it is my belief that she will never be herself again until she does. She might take a situation abroad—in a school if she could not get anything else. I shall certainly talk to mamma and papa about it to-morrow.”

“You will never drive Connie into exile again,” said I, “and you had better refrain from the subject with her.”

“With her! you may depend on my saying nothing to *her*. She puts on a look that is a warning whenever I approach her affairs with a single word. I don’t think years always count for age; there is nothing of the girl left about her. She is half a lifetime older than you or I.”

It was on this occasion that being placed for a few minutes near Mrs. Maurice that kind-hearted woman made the regretful allusion to her son which I have quoted elsewhere,—

“Charlie was a good fellow; he would have spent his life to make Connie happy.” But Charlie was a long way off—report said, courting Mr. Foxley’s pretty niece; and there was Dr. Julius more distant than any stranger, and Connie

dancing amongst the children with a heart ready to break.

The juvenile supper was judiciously arranged to take place at nine o'clock, and afterwards the assembly dispersed, the little ones all enriched by a gift from the Christmas-tree. Mrs. Surtees' nurse had arrived to take Connie's pupils in charge, and she returned home with Ursula and myself, thoroughly worn out, as her white face betrayed. Papa and mamma both remarked on it anxiously, and she at once said good-night, and acknowledged herself tired to escape their scrutiny, which gave Ursula the opportunity of introducing her new project while it was hot in her mind.

"Looks ill; and well she may!" was her opening exclamation. "Dr. Julius Eden was there. It was very inconsiderate and forgetful of Miss Pegge Burnell to invite him. Quennell could have lighted up the tree just as well."

Mamma was grieved.

"It was a pity; but they did not speak to each other, I suppose," said she.

"Good gracious, mamma, what are you thinking

about? *Of course* they did not speak! Who thought they would? Even Connie, weak as she is, must have more sense of what is becoming and due to herself than to *speak* to a man who has used her so atrociously!"

"Come, come, Ursula, do not exaggerate," interposed papa.

"Shall I say instead—who used her as she deserved? There are two views of the question, I know," was the satirical rejoinder.

"Perhaps you had better say nothing, my dear," was mamma's gentle advice.

"Yes, there is one thing I *will* say, and that is, Connie ought to leave Redcross. It is a humiliation to see her stay hankering about here."

"Nonsense; we shall not part with her again. Good-night, girls, go to bed," and papa, who had been lighting our candles, now handed Ursula hers with a gesture of dismissal which she was obliged to obey.

Connie was on her knees when I entered our room, but she was weeping bitterly, with her face in her hands. It was long before she rose, but

she had then in some measure recovered her self-control, and was the first to speak.

“Doris, I know what Ursie has been saying to papa and mamma,” she began. “She wants them to send me away from home, does she not?”

“Yes, darling, but they will not listen to her,” was my reply.

“You must not let them. Oh, I could not go amongst strangers now whatever it were to escape; but I will pay no more visits. It was dreadful to-night; it would have relieved me to shriek aloud.”

“It would have been better if you had not met.”

She pressed her forehead between her hands, and said,—

“Yes; we are a thousand miles away from each other’s hearts now.”

Her soft lips quivered, and her eyes filled again at the thought, but she spoke of it no more, and I fell asleep to dream that she was being caught on the shore by the inflowing tide, and that I could not save her, and woke again to hear her suppressed crying in the dead of the night,

when she could give way because she believed that no ear hearkened. My poor little sister! it would be a long, long while yet before the inward bleeding of her wounds was stanchèd and healed!

X.

A MEDIATOR.

THE following afternoon I received a visit from Miss Theodora Bousfield in the absence of both my sisters. It was now a considerable time since she had been up at the cottage, and when she began to speak there was a degree of hesitation in her manner quite foreign to it, and which prepared me for some topic more interesting to both than is commonly brought up at an ordinary call.

“I was thankful to see your Connie at the Priory last night with the Surtees children,” said she, rushing into her subject suddenly like a person who has an end in view. “I thought at first she was not going to recognize me, but she did, and coloured up beautifully, which made her look more like herself again, only, if possible, prettier. Why

does she turn a cold shoulder to me? she has no warmer friend in the world. It will out, Doris. Oh, what a foolish, foolish quarrel that has been."

I understood Miss Theodora to refer to Dr. Julius Eden, and therefore I held my peace; to express a sentiment to her on that subject would have been much like speaking to Dr. Julius himself.

"It has been a great vexation to me," she went on, finding me unresponsive, "a very great vexation. But all the mischances of life seem to arise from some blind perversity or rashness, which a very little reflection would have obviated. Those two were born for each other, they would have been perfectly happy, they are full of contrasts that suit in so many ways. I have heard him describe her as a mixture of innocent impulses and natural reserve that was charming to him, yet when that reserve infringed on what he esteemed as his own rights, he took it hastily as a sign of deeper faults and an unforgiveable error in itself. He was too exacting, he never calculated on the awe that his superior age and wisdom might inspire in a young thing like Connie.

I always believed there was fear mingled with her love, or she would have redeemed her first want of confidence by a prompt confession. Ah! Doris, why did you not make her do it? What misery it would have spared them both! I wonder whether any of you ever appreciated the horrible pain and mortification it was to him to hear her name bandied about and sneered over, and not to know how or where to defend her, because she had practised a systematic deception on himself? We know now that Ursula was most to blame, but Connie showed weakness in submitting to her greater than Julius had suspected in her character. She was so ingenuous and so simple once, her reticence notwithstanding; he had implicit faith in her affection which she never dissembled; he is proud, and her honour was his honour, but he should have been *just*—he should have heard her in her own defence.”

“Connie never would have defended herself to him,” I now said. “If he suspected her of careless conduct that was enough. I should have thought he might have known her better with the opportunities he had; he was alone in his mis-

understanding of her amongst those who professed to love her. She was very young, and as little worldly wise as a girl could be when she left home, and had she known the perils of her position as well as she bore its annoyances, she would have left it quickly. But there was her pity and her ignorance, and Ursula's urgent, pretentious advice combined against her, and she never woke up to understand whither her petty discomforts and persecutions were tending, until the end came, and revealed a host of concealed dangers. I quite believe that in this instance poor Mrs. Tom Claridge made her own misery, and invited trouble by her fantastical suspicions. She was foolish enough to persecute Connie, and to worry her husband on account of a girl to whom he only behaved with surly respect; Connie was utterly in the dark as to the facts, until the great outbreak came. Even yet she knows less, probably, than many other persons to whom the unhappy wife permits herself to make confidences; she has no idea to what extent she was distrusted, or what use was made of her innocent name; and she never will be told, if I can prevent it. I want the whole

affair to die away ; it is an old story now, and there can be no good in re-opening it. I shall always think Dr. Julius Eden used her cruelly ; but she has every influential voice in her favour, and in time she will live down the wrong he has done her."

"So she will, Doris ; she is a good, brave little soul ; but there's heart-break in her face for all that. With patience and courage women may conquer a slander, and be none the worse for having suffered it, except now and then perhaps, when the lie that has poisoned a life-time will ache in our secret heart, as keenly as the most stinging truths. I cannot but think that Connie still writhes under it at times and seasons."

"No doubt of that. Every woman who is worth the name is sensitive, and very sensitive to personal contumely. Connie has felt that more deeply and more poignantly, I do believe, than even the loss of Dr. Julius Eden's affection."

"Oh, Doris, she has never lost *that* ! Scarcely had he put her out of his reach, than he repented, as a man like him was sure to repent, of a cruel,

unjust, and unworthy act. I never spared him. I told him he should have remembered that if he had been the accused, he could have found and claimed a hearing on his own behalf; but that Connie could do no such thing, without, in some sort, verifying the aspersion on her modesty. I never heard of a hard deed done in a harder way than his sending back her letters without a word. He deserves all the remorse and pain he has had to suffer since because of it."

"I think so too. It is impossible to conceive of anything more cruel and more cutting to a high-spirited and pure-minded girl than the manner in which he threw Connie off. There is no extenuation for it, save in the supposition that when he acted as he did he was incapable of thinking of anybody but himself. It is difficult to believe that he ever really loved her, when he could become so utterly lost to all consideration of her feelings."

"He loved her then, and he loves her and longs for her still, with every nerve he has. He has never suffered her idea to fade in his imagination; there is a vast fund of generosity and tender-

ness in his heart ; and seeing how she has suffered for his wrong and for his sake, he would fain lavish all on her to make amends. He never loses sight of her now for a single day. His letters to me in Switzerland last autumn were filled with her, until they became monotonous. I wish—I wish with all my soul, we could bring about a reconciliation. I believe yet he is the one person in the world to make her happy.”

“I do not know about his making her happy, but I know he can make her profoundly wretched. Sometimes I could almost find in my heart to wish she were away from Redcross altogether, with the past forgotten, and a new hope before her.”

“Oh, Doris, don’t try to deceive yourself and me. You know very well that Connie is not one of those women who can change their love as they can change their slippers. So far as being happy goes, she would be happier with the crumbs of Julius Eden’s kindness, than with any other man’s most lavish abundance.”

That was my belief too, but I was not going to confess it, at least, not to Miss Theodora Bousfield.

“And as for him,” she went on, “if he has not the courage to undo his own ill work, it will make a hard, stern man of him. I see that temper strengthening in him already. His disappointment is not a boy’s disappointment, to be easily done away. He has kind domestic affections, and without an object as he grows older, he will be very lonely, but he will never make a home for any woman, unless it be for Connie. That meeting last night betrayed to each the other’s feelings; they love still, but he has done his best to fix a great gulf between them. Her look must have touched him to the quick with pity, remorse, and sorrow: it is the sweetest face. She is no longer the tractable, all-trusting, fond little soul, whom he could lead with a look of kindness, but a woman of vehement feeling, whom he has insulted and injured, and who knows it. Will she ever forgive him? That is the question, Doris—will she ever forgive him?”

“I have no assurance that she will,” was my grave reply. “I do not say that she is changed, but her character is intensified. The reserve which a generous affection might have overcome,

has mastered her so far that she rarely or ever alludes to what is past. From being the most sprightly and cheerful creature in the world, she has become silent and guarded. Her good heart keeps her always pleasant and kind at home, but society is a weariness to her, and our friends she avoids. Until last night I had not heard her mention Dr. Julius Eden's name for months, and I regret exceedingly that they should have met as they did, though she behaved beautifully."

"She shook like an aspen when I spoke to her, or, I think, I must have said one word for Julius; as it was I dared not venture it."

"Much better not."

"But you are not against him, Doris? If a reconciliation were possible, you would not discourage it."

"I would discourage nothing that might restore her to peace and happiness; but I will neither help nor hinder now, because I do not see my way. Connie makes no sign. She has accepted for herself at present a life of work and sacrifice, and she is living it quietly and simply. I do not think she looks a day onward, the future cannot

be very bright to her imagination, as you may suppose."

"Julius counts you always as his friend."

"And so I was; I liked him exceedingly: it would have been the happiest day in my life, if I could have seen them married, loving each other as they did before she ever left us. But his line of conduct took me by surprise afterwards; I thought it blindly rash and cruelly unjust. Does he think I can forget the long agony of all those months that followed on his harshness? Can any of us look at Connie now and *not* remember it? He has put it out of my power to be his friend, for I think Connie might prudently refuse to intrust her life again to such reckless mastership. There is no mystery in their separation; each knows how much has been borne, and how much there is to be forgiven. I will put no bar in his way, but neither will I be go-between to forward a reconciliation. I do not trust him as once I did; and if he cannot, or dare not, plead his own cause, he will find no advocate in me. I will advise nothing; he acted on his own will and responsi-

bility to do the mischief, and on his own responsibility alone need he expect to repair it."

"It always grieves me to see these separations between people who, in spite of all mistake and wrong, still love each other; pray that these two may not waste life in remembering and resenting. Where there is affection, forgiveness should be easy. You do not deny that Connie cherishes a fond recollection of when she was happy, Doris?"

"I don't know what she cherishes; she keeps all her thoughts in her own heart now. It is not to Dr. Julius only that she is lost—I sometimes think her best and brightest self is lost to all of us. But time may restore it; God knows: if not, she will be like hundreds of other quiet, good, toilsome women, who throw their energies into hard work when they are forced to bid farewell to the joys and hopes of youth."

"I *will* not see a dull future for Connie; such a capability of happiness and full, perfect life was never given to be left empty. The sunshine is only overclouded—the day has not set; we

shall see brighter smiles than ever on the bright face yet."

"Never!" said I.

But my visitor quitted me not altogether discouraged, as her look and tone betrayed, and I was left to speculate on the ultimate issue of her mission. It was improbable that she should have spoken to me as she had done, unless at Dr. Julius Eden's suggestions; and it was still more improbable that the matter would be allowed to rest at this point; but where would it *end*? that I knew not.

In the evening I told Connie of Miss Theodora's visit, but though she slightly changed colour, she asked no question about our interview, and I felt it safer not to give her any hint of our conversation. I cannot exactly tell what I looked for, but it was something that would bring back the roses to her cheeks and the lustre to her pretty eyes, but nothing came. A week of vague expectancy on my part elapsed, but nothing happened. I thought it very strange, very incomprehensible, and my disappointment opened my eyes to my secret hope as it diminished and grew

faint. I had indulged a latent desire that Dr. Julius Eden should endeavour to reinstate himself in his former position, and that Connie might possibly meet his forgiveness half-way; I cannot express how grieved and indignant I felt when the days slipped by unmarked by any new event, and I was obliged to relinquish my fond anticipation. No suspicion of how it had been thwarted ever entered my mind; the only explanation I could give myself was that Miss Theodora Bousfield had no authority but her own for probing me, and that Dr. Julius Eden had declined to avail himself of her officious friendship—that, in fact, he had ceased to care for Connie from the first of their disunion, and that Miss Theodora was mistaken in believing him still constant in his attachment. Then was I thankful that I had kept my own counsel, and spared my darling all new fret and vexation.

The Sunday following Miss Theodora's visit to me I missed Dr. Julius Eden from his place in church, and afterwards I heard the Maurices casually remark that the Edens had given up their sittings at Redcross, and were going in

future to attend Mr. Surtees' ministry at Scarcliffe new church, which was nearer to their house, and more convenient for the old physician in the winter weather.

I was anxious to see Miss Theodora again after this, and I called twice at Dr. Bousfield's house to find her absent; but subsequent to my second attempt she sent me a few lines to say that she was sorry "*it* had come to nothing, but she could not and would not give up hope yet; she did not blame Connie, or think any the worse of her, but she was disappointed." These enigmatical lines puzzled me, and I made another endeavour to see their writer, again without success; but as she did not then attempt to find me, neither did I any more seek her, and soon after my last failure I heard that she was gone abroad, and would probably be absent many months.

XI.

URSULA'S DOINGS.

DURING this brief interval of secret anxiety, Ursula, in spite of discouragement from every quarter, continued most pertinaciously to push her idea of driving Connie once more away from Redcross. There was a vehement, restless, worrying tenacity about her on this point, that exceeded all the energy of her old persecutions and successes. She betrayed the keenest personal interest in it, and when failure became more and more certain, she gave way to angry invectives, let loose her tongue against Connie, as in her most virulent moments, and sent the poor girl to her pillow weeping and humiliated many and many a night. She appealed to Mrs. Maurice and to Miss Pegge Burnell to declare whether they also did not recommend, at least, a temporary exile; but

Mrs. Maurice decided that Connie was better at home under all circumstances, and Miss Pegge Burnell said, without hesitation, that, were she in her favourite's place, whatever Ursula advised she should make a point of acting in direct opposition to. Thus foiled on every side, Ursula raved against me as being the foundation of the opposition to her, and quite mystified me at times, by the anxious, fretful agitation she betrayed; how long she might have continued to vex herself and me upon the matter I know not; but a sharp mortification, quite personal to herself and quite unexpected, which happened at this juncture, had the effect of turning some of her indignation into another channel.

Her holidays were about half-way over, when the post one morning brought her a letter from Erlstone Castle, during the perusal of which her colour gradually rose, until, by the time she reached the conclusion, her face was purple, and her eyes filled with tears of rage. I asked her kindly what was the matter, to which she snappishly replied, by bidding me never mind; it was nothing that concerned me. The news, what-

ever it might be, had quite spoilt her enjoyment of her breakfast, for, taking the letter in her hand, she retreated to her own room, leaving her coffee almost untouched, and did not come down again until Connie had set off to Scarcliffe for her day's work.

When she rejoined me in the drawing-room, she threw the document down on the table before me, saying roughly:

"I suppose you are devoured with curiosity to know what has happened—it is no secret, or won't be one long; there is the letter, you can read it."

The epistle proved to be from the countess herself, and it intimated that Ursula's services as governess at Erlstone Castle would be dispensed with at the ensuing Easter, when the boys were to go to Eton, and the girls, their grandmamma thought, would be old enough to begin to profit by the instruction and companionship of an accomplished foreign teacher—a thorough musician and linguist, such as had been just introduced to her by Lady Claridge. Apart from the dismissal, I thought the letter cold and unfriendly: it con-

tained no single word in acknowledgment of Ursula's past care of the children, and must in every light have been mortifying and humiliating to receive.

“A governess may slave and slave herself to skin and bone, and never earn a spark of gratitude!” exclaimed Ursula, with much vehemence of tone and manner. “I have been with those children more than two years, and there are my thanks! But I am convinced that nurse is at the bottom of it! I know she has been telling the countess that I make favourites, which she once had the insolence to tell me! As if it were possible to love all children alike; and Julia is an odious little creature—a sly little tell-tale, that I shall always maintain.”

Ursula had never complained of any difficulties and annoyances at Erlstone Castle, and this was the first intimation that she had carried her injustice of temper into her duty. It revealed enough, but I refrained from remark, and she struck off on another tack.

“I am not accomplished enough to teach two chits of eight and ten—well, that is news! I wish

they may know as much as I do when they are as old! I shall require a situation much superior to Erlstone when I go out again! Well, I don't care—things always come right in the end. I have not found appreciation yet, but I shall find it some day, or there's no honesty in the world!”

This bitter cud of philosophy affected Ursula's mood for several days. She wore a martyred air, desisted from teasing Connie, fancied a cold, and stayed indoors. But at the end of that time she recovered, and circulated her story amongst our friends in a much more graceful aspect than it had worn in the Countess of Calcedon's letter. Mrs. Peacocke, however, who had a polite animosity towards Ursula for some reason undiscovered, declined to accept her view, and during a call that she paid us at this time she said, with civil spite, that she had heard Ursula's temper was not so conciliatory as a governess's should be, and also that she was not clever enough to carry forward the education of the young ladies now they were growing up.

“Growing up! they are only eight and ten!”

retorted Ursula, passing over the allusion to her temper with judicious blindness.

“Indeed! Then why *are* you leaving?”

“I want a better situation.”

“You will hardly find one in this part of the world. I always understood that you were so *very* comfortable, but, of course, each of us knows best where her own shoe pinches, and, no doubt, the life of a dependent young woman in a great house has many slights to bear which it would be mortifying to expose. Ah! Miss Ursula, I am afraid some day you will wish you had married when you had the chance—it may never occur again.”

“To that I am perfectly indifferent,” replied Ursula, smiling superior. “I am truly thankful to be able to work and make myself independent of protection. If I were in the position of the Willoughby and Brown-Standon girls, I suppose it would be the first object of my life to get married and taken care of, but fortunately I am endowed with faculties which are of some use in the world both to myself and others.”

“Yes, and it is well you have the sense to

do your duty in the humble position to which it has graciously pleased Providence to call you. None of us can do more than that—can we? I will inquire for you amongst my friends—let me understand exactly, Miss Ursula—would you describe yourself as a nursery-governess, or what?”

“Don’t trouble yourself, Mrs. Peacocke, pray! People in your rank of life do not pay my salary, and besides I prefer to be amongst gentlefolks. Amongst your set a governess is at a discount; socially she is your equal, and educationally she is often your superior, but she is treated as a dependant, under obligations which must be reciprocated by a subservience and humility of manner such as are degrading to an educated woman. I consider that professional working women ought to take rank with professional working men, and it is their own fault chiefly that they do not; but at all events I will never lower myself by assuming an inferiority of condition which I do not feel.”

“But, my dear Miss Ursula, *all* working women are at a discount; a woman loses caste

the moment she is driven to depend on her own exertions for a livelihood. It *must* be so—and very justly too—I am sure *I* should not like to work for my bread, and I should feel it a sad come-down in the world were I reduced to it. Socially I do not consider any working woman *my* equal, whatever *you* do, Miss Ursula.”

“Are bees lower in the scale of creation than butterflies?”

“Well, yes, my dear, I think so—a butterfly is a *lady*-insect—a bee is a working-woman insect. No, no; you will not trap me there. I always thought, and I always *shall* think, work derogates from a woman’s position in every point of view.”

• “My excellent Mrs. Peacocke, where have you boxed up your intelligence to be left so far behind the age as *that*? Those ideas of yours have been exploded these many years—dead donkeys every one of them! It is honourable to work in this generation.”

“*Theoretically*, my dear; *practically*, no. The prejudice against it will take a long while to perish yet. But it is wise to make a virtue of necessity; and far be it from me, thankful for

my happier fortune, to make you out of heart with yours. Go on and prosper, Miss Ursula; we know who has ordained varying ranks and conditions of life, and I shall always say that the Layels and yourselves are young persons much to be respected—very worthy young women each in her own way.”

“I’m sure, Mrs. Peacocke, we are much obliged to you.”

“Yes, my dear; I have not the vulgar contempt for a governess that I have seen exhibited by some people. I confess that I did once highly disapprove of Miss Janet Layel and her scribbling, but she is so quiet and simple about it that she disarms one’s resentment. I thought it right to take her to task once on the subject, but she begged me to admit that stories were as useful as artificial flowers——”

“A good hit! well done, Jenny Layel. You always have a small garden on your head, you know, Mrs. Peacocke, and she did right to appeal to a weak point. You could not dispense with finery, could you?” struck in Ursula.

“I trust I shall always dress suitably to my

position, Miss Ursula; but you did not allow me to finish my sentence. I was about to add that I do *not* think stories as useful as artificial flowers, because the latter *always* embellish the person, and the former do not *always* embellish the mind. I think I convinced her, for she said no more. However, if she has not capacity for anything higher than writing, we must pity and not blame her; for it is her misfortune rather than her fault. I did suggest to her that she might take a situation as companion to a lady; but to that she replied that she would rather live in her shoe—an exaggerated form of expression, which betrays how her judgment is weakened by letting her imagination run. I could have got her a place with an aunt of my own, who is very deaf, and likes to be read aloud to in amusing books, which I should have thought would have exactly suited her; she would not have had much sitting up or exercise, and only plain needlework, for my aunt is a serious person; but I could not bring her to see it in my light—she would only laugh and quiz, and I could not absolutely be angry with her. But to think

of any young woman declining an easy home such as I have described, and preferring to toil with her pen hours and hours, and then to dig and delve and rake and weed and make a fright of herself in a bit of garden, which will never be anything but a span square! And *that* the infatuated little creature has the folly to call being happy in her own way! Defend me from such happiness!"

"And I wish I could attain to it," retorted Ursula; "I would much rather be Jenny Layel than yourself, Mrs. Peacocke."

Mrs. Peacocke laughed with perfect incredulity, and said she would not be affronted, which drew from Ursula's lips the pungent retort that she would patronize the Great Mogul if she met him, and then they bade good day with extreme civility.

Ursula was not always communicative on her own affairs, and I believed her to be now in treaty for some new engagement, because she had, ever since the letter from Erlstone, lain in wait for the post-man each morning regularly. But after Mrs. Peacocke's visit she told me she had nothing

particular in view; and though she professed an utter disregard for that little woman's opinions, it was palpable that they had galled her to the quick.

“Did you ever hear anything to equal her impertinence?” cried she, growing red and irate as soon as we were alone. “But it all comes of those horrid reviews and newspapers! They profess to know all about women, and therefore why don't they speak of us with respect, instead of calling us drags and rubbish? I am sure the abominably insolent way in which some of them allude to us is enough to make us envy the courtesy paid to well-conditioned dogs. Am I in any way the inferior of that little Pharisee, Mrs. Peacocke? I should think not, indeed! Yet her tone is that of the tea-and-toast articles exactly. Should I be more respectable if I had married the Fortuner, and were rolling about in my carriage, with a husband I despised, than I am now, helping myself with my own head and hands! I should not be more respectable, but I should have had more respect! I am not surprised at girls being in a hurry to marry anything

when I see the ignominy that attends being single and self-dependent. If Mr. Barstow were to turn up again and make me an offer now, I believe I should be idiot enough to accept him."

"No, you would not, Ursie," said I, in a conciliatory tone. "Mrs. Peacocke is not worth caring about, and never mind the incivility of the newspapers."

"Of course, I don't mind it *really*, but it is a great mistake and in very bad taste. They are rude to us *en masse*, though it is not to be supposed that the most caustic of reviewers would utter his offensive savageries to our faces individually. I have no doubt there could be a thousand and one ill-natured things said about men if we only knew it. For my part I am thankful to be independent of the conceited creatures."

I could not help smiling at Ursula's pepperiness, though, indeed, I agree with her in the opinion that a little more courtesy in the tone of writing about women would be no loss in these modern days. The main body of them are as harmless, inoffensive, patient, pleasant, necessary beings as of old, and it is a pity to rasp their feelings with

impertinent criticism and rough epithets, which are far from generally applicable. Women whose lot it is to maintain themselves by independent work, and who do it creditably, so far as I have seen, are as happy and useful as their sisters who are married and have some one to toil for them, though here and there are to be met otherwise sensible persons who feel and express a distrust and aversion of their standing alone, even when circumstances compel it. I remember hearing old Dr. Eden say to Miss Jenny Layel, more in earnest than in jest, that in his opinion no woman ought to pretend to be her own mistress, or to have a home of her own, being unmarried, until she was forty! To which that little person conclusively replied: "I was obliged to be forty at seventeen, Dr. Eden."

And that is the case with hundreds of us; we must be forty at seventeen, and our work is at once protection, support, and respectability to us. I believe a girl with an object of duty may go to and fro the world now, and neither risk nor incur one personal incivility; and that is only as it should be. Why then such an outcry over the position of single women? They may work at

whatever they are fit for, without let or hindrance. And why so many rude sneers at the self-protecting and supporting? Fortune elects them to their condition, and there are plenty of rough bits and discouraging difficulties to plod through without their being hampered by weak prejudices and pelted on the road with hard language, to which self-respect forbids reply. The old axiom that it is cowardly to strike the helpless has gone out of fashion.

It is by no means an evil that women should work; work is good for them, of whatever kind it be, and it is *fitness* that lacks more than opportunity. And I fear that fitness will lack so long as women heed more the coarse derision of men who speak contemptuously of toilers and spinsters, than they heed their own comfort and well-being. Unless there be a latent fault in their own characters, no work will unfemininize them. I do not deny that when a girl is thrown on her own resources very young, and obliged to depend wholly and solely on her own principles, judgment and sagacity, that she may and often does acquire a promptness of manner and independence of tone

which are not amongst the charms of the sex ; but charms are not in her way, usefulness is, and steadfastness and purpose ; and these she does wisely to cultivate. I have known in my time many sensible, practical spinsters of this type, and I do not remember one discontented driveller amongst them all. And as for the credit of them, is it not better to have an active, useful, helpful working woman relation, than to have a poor dependant, ashamed to work, but not ashamed to beg or to subsist meanly on mean charity.

It is not long ago that I heard a lady suggest to a young governess on a visit at her house for the holidays, that she should be careful not to betray her occupation, for that people in that neighbourhood looked down on a governess, and never thought her *quite* a lady ; but the poor lassie said she would make no false pretences ; she was not degraded by her work, and she would not degrade it by concealment. In that temper women must learn to look at their labour, or it will never rise into respect ; by the estimate they set on their work, the world will learn by and by to estimate it, too, and they will then cease

to be the objects of contemptuous pity and sarcastic discouragement, but not before. The necessity to toil implies to some minds the absence of those refinements which mark the gentlewoman, yet need it do so? The hardest taskwork is compatible with every moral and mental grace, and to some of them it adds new strength indeed; I believe the contempt for work and the scorn of working women proceeds in reality from the very common and prolific root of evil, the admiration of money. To be poor is to the Peacockes of this generation to be despicable.

There are signs of amateurism about most of the articles on working women that I have read, that are damaging to the subject. What do the successful old governesses say on it? What do the good music mistresses, female artists and authoresses who have been lucky say? They don't say anything, I believe; they are minding their business, and people who have none are making moan over them.

Do men allow themselves to be damaged in their professions by those who have failed, and gone down to social perdition? Assuredly not.

Yet from the modern lament over women, the whole sex might be turning out a dismal failure. Men are not ashamed to print insolent, sweeping criticisms on us, which the dullest scribblers of them all would blush to propound to the most commonplace woman of his acquaintance, and which the most commonplace woman of his acquaintance would probably tell him were flippant and vulgar exaggerations. It may be said that they defeat themselves, that they do no harm, that nobody believes them. But that requires proof; I think they do much harm, seething up like scum from the fermentation of society. It is not good for women any more than it is pleasant, to hear that men think of them disrespectfully and contemptuously; that to be solitary and old are evils, and that it would relieve the anxious minds of many philanthropic persons could their numbers be lawfully diminished. I do not know where this tone originated, but I trust that the personal respect we still enjoy may not follow in the wake of the popular respect that has been taken from us; for if courtesy vanish from men's lips as it has vanished from some of their pens, what is to

prevent our falling back into savagedom and re-appearing in paint and sheepskins.

There was a test when I was young, by which I have heard mamma and others estimate the men of our acquaintance. One who never sneered at women was regarded as having his friends amongst the best, and as being endowed with a good heart, generous feelings, and the tastes of a gentleman. Another, who never lost an opportunity to insinuate an insolent sarcasm, was set down as a person of low mind, whose perceptions had been perverted by evil communications in his youth.

The most utterly foolish, awkward, nervous person whom I ever saw, was a flimsy, faint-eyed gentleman, whom we met at Captain Willoughby's the last time I was ever there. I remember pitying him, he seemed so thoroughly ill at ease when introduced amongst us for a simple evening's amusement; but afterwards I heard Miss Cranmer remark that he was one type of the genus *fast man*, and that he was always wretchedly out of his element in the company of respectable women. Is it persons of his kind who, out of the depths of their own experience, write the rude articles

depreciatory of our sex? According to mamma's test, it seems not improbable; but when I suggested that explanation of their bad taste to Miss Jenny Layel, she laughed and said, "Oh, no; most likely the writers had nice mothers and sisters, or wives and daughters of their own at home; but that the 'Condition of women, their rights and their wrongs,' was a popular subject just then, and it was difficult to say anything new and at the same time pleasant about it."

"It is a cheap amusement to sneer at us, at all events," Ursula sulkily remarked, handing over for my perusal a peculiarly ill-natured tea-and-toast article, which had appeared the week before. "I have nothing to do; I will see if I cannot write something rather more to the purpose. That man evidently speaks under the impression that a woman, like a dog and a walnut-tree, is the better the more beating she gets."

Ursula allowed her temper full play, but when her essay "on the prevalent errors of opinion with regard to women," came to be read over before Miss Jenny Layel, it did not make any sensation. It was rather flat, in fact; but the

verdict of dulness was not received in good part by Ursula, who replied to it by the irrelevant remark that *she* did not pretend to be an authoress, or to know the tricks of their trade; but if she did, she hoped she should write something better than novels, the very chief of which were only ephemeral productions.

Miss Jenny Layel laughed with perfect good-humour, on which Ursula added, apologetically, that she did not exactly condemn novels, though she did not consider them a very improving branch of literature, and confessed that she had once even tried to write a story herself, but had found her characters so unmanageable and deficient in small talk, that she had given it up; but she had no doubt it was very easy to those who had a turn for cooking up events and personal reminiscences, which she supposed she had not.

“And even if I had, I would not use it,” said she; “you know one woman cannot be everything, and I would much rather be a good governess than an average authoress; I do so hate notoriety and publicity.”

"You might write fifty novels and never come in the way of either," rejoined Miss Jenny Layel.

"Oh! but if I did take the trouble to be a writer, I would never mew myself up behind a feigned name as you do. Alwyn Cragg! such a preposterous title. While you were about it, why did you not choose something appropriate and descriptive? Trot-Cosy, for instance; Trot-Cosy! there we have you at once, person, mind, and manner. No; if I wrote I would live in London and see people."

"And be a minnow amongst big fishes," suggested the lady novelist.

"I don't know *that*," was the piqued rejoinder. "If I had anything to write about, I have no doubt I could write as well as anybody else; for, after all, what is there in nine-tenths of the books one reads? Nothing but a *rechauffé* of old ideas and a hash of old incidents. The people fall in love and in trouble, and are pulled through a maze of three volumes to the altar of Hymen, as they say, and then there is a grand marriage scene, or a tragical smash, and you shut up the book feeling as if you had had too full a meal of chaff. No; if

ever I turn anything in the literary way, I shall turn critic."

"I hope you will deal tenderly with me; I hate to be cut up," pleaded Miss Jenny Layel, laughing.

"Not at all; I shall be *just*. Surely you don't mean to say you prefer adulation to the *truth*?" asked Ursula with the utmost seriousness.

"Yes, I do; wait till you have written a book and find the critic you respect falling foul of your prettiest scenes, and making offensive personal reflections on faults that he has evolved out of his own imagination, and then you will see how you like what you call *truth*."

"Well, I consider that truly mean-spirited. If I did write a book I should expect to take the consequences as if I were a man."

"Theoretically, of course; we all fancy so; but practically I would rather be sheltered under the privileges of my sex. Perhaps men don't care for little slurs, but women do; I don't believe them when they deny it."

"Then why assume an epicene *nom de plume*? But I suppose that is only a veil, and if I were

a critic, I should always be sure there was a woman behind it. You would not catch the smallest man pretending to be one of us; he would be plain John or Thomas. Still, if you are sensitive, I wonder you should have taken to scribbling. I always thought it rather—rather——”

“Rather what?”

“Why, disreputable. Actors and authors are generally so *queer*, are they not?”

“I’m sure I don’t know—am I *queer*?”

“No; you are quite common-place; but I was not meaning *you*; if I had not been told, I should not have known you from any other woman given up to domestic economy and crochet work. I will try again: if *you* can write a book, I don’t see at all why *I* should not be able to write one too; and it must be much pleasanter than governessing, is it not?”

“Yes; when it succeeds.”

“Oh, I shall not do anything to fail, I can assure you. I have got an idea in my head!”

“Confide it to me, Miss Ursula; is it anything very novel?”

“ You need not laugh, you will see. I shall set about it directly. You only write on one side of the paper, do you?”

“ No, only on one side.”

“ That is all I want to know ; and when I have finished my story you shall have the first read of the manuscript.”

“ Thank you.”

With her new scheme of independence, Ursula became quite sprightly and cheerful for a few days ; in imagination she had already written a book, and achieved success ; but when it came to the regular work of drawing out her idea, her energy and ambition flagged, and she found it not so easy as she expected. To assist her efforts she procured a volume of Miss Jenny Layel's stories from the library, and reading them over aloud, she appealed to me whether they were not such as anybody might write ? Then she studied a batch of *Saturday Reviews*, more to her discouragement than her help, and after about six beginnings, which would not stir beyond the beginning, she threw up the attempt with the disdainful declaration that, after all, tales were

trash, not worth the time spent over them, either to write or to read, and, therefore, it would be wrong in her to waste hers in such profitless dawdling.

The same day she wrote to Miss Heywood to tell her she should be disengaged at Easter, and to beg her to do her utmost to find for her a new appointment either in London or near it, which our old governess promised to do. With her own affairs once more in train, she then had leisure to revert to Connie's, and this she did with such an accession of fervour, after an accidental meeting with Dr. Julius Eden one afternoon as they were returning together from Scarcliffe, that I almost feared she would succeed in her object, if not by convincing us of its expedience, by making Connie herself feel her position unendurable. But happily the end of her holidays arrived before it could be accomplished, and peace and quietness reigned amongst us once more as soon as she departed.

XII.

RUMOUR.

CONNIE had been employed as daily governess to the Surtees children for a period of about four months, when, calling on Miss Pegge Burnell one afternoon alone, she asked me with a little significant air, if I knew Mr. Frederick Surtees, their uncle. I said I had never seen him, but I had heard Connie once or twice mention his name, I thought; but there was such a clan of that family, it was hard work to distinguish one from the other, and I could not be perfectly sure.

“Connie does not talk about him particularly? then, of course, there is nothing in it.”

“In what?” I inquired.

“Oh, in Miss Cranmer’s gossip. But she was telling me yesterday that Mr. Frederick Surtees is much more frequently seen in attendance on

his little nephew and nieces than he would be were they not under the charge of a handsome young governess."

"Miss Cranmer's gossip is always either gross exaggeration or invention pure and simple," returned I, much annoyed.

"You are quite right, so it is. There ought to be a district society for the discouragement of premature reports, because of the mischief they do in nipping romances in the bud. Frederick Surtees is an excellent fellow ; but if it teases you, I will not allude to it any more. Tell me about Ursula ; has she found another situation yet?"

But I had nothing to communicate on Ursula's account, and I presently took my leave of the old lady, a prey to feelings of the keenest vexation. Surely Connie had been talked about enough, and might be suffered to rest now. Being on a tour of duty-calls, card-case in hand, I did not carry my crossness home at once, as I was tempted to do, but went on to Mrs. Braithwaite's. The cheerful widow chatted cheerfully on a variety of subjects until I rose to go, when she said, with the most suave of smiles,—

“Am I to offer my congratulations, Miss Fletcher?”

I asked rather abruptly, “What about?”

“Oh, then it is not yet a settled thing! I heard it was. Miss Cranmer met them yesterday on the sands walking together, and the children half a mile off, which looked rather like it.”

“Met whom?”

“Your sister Connie and young Mr. Frederick Surtees. You know he is coming to be his uncle’s curate.”

“No, I knew nothing about it.”

“They say he took the highest honours at Oxford, and from all I can hear he will be a most delightful addition to our little society. I expect to meet him at the Rectory this evening; are you and Miss Connie going?”

“The Maurices were kind enough to invite us, but we excused ourselves.”

“You have not been out much this winter, I have not seen you anywhere.”

“It is not convenient. Late hours and visiting do not agree with Connie’s long day’s work.”

“No, I daresay not, poor girl. It is a pity

to see her so thrown away; and though she begins to look stronger, it must be a very hard life. I hate teaching. Mrs. Maurice, on the plea of my being an idle woman, deluded me into taking a class at the Sunday school for a little while, but I soon gave it up, and prevailed on Miss Jenny Layel to replace me."

From Mrs. Braithwaite's I went to Mrs. Peacocke, who introduced the offensive topic almost in her first breath.

"I have just had Miss Cranmer, and she brings me the most extraordinary news. I suppose I must offer my best felicitations," simpered she, blandly.

"Indeed, Mrs. Peacocke, I am not aware of any ground for them."

"Well, I said it was wonderful, if true," cried she, surprised into incivility by a feeling of proud satisfaction; "most wonderful, indeed, if true. And you do right to contradict it before it spreads. Gentlemen and dignitaries of the church are not in the habit of forming alliances with teachers." I was silent, and she went on: "And besides he is much too old for her; he is fifty-

five if he is an hour. His eldest daughter must be Connie's age, for she was quite a tall girl when he lost his wife, and that must be a dozen years ago. He has seven children, if not eight, but I think one died. And then his position in the church! I said to Miss Cranmer that she must certainly be misinformed. A man of his standing could never commit the indecorum of marrying a girl like Connie."

"Of whom are you speaking all this time, Mrs. Peacocke?" I asked, at the first pause.

"Of Archdeacon Surtees, Mr. Surtees' eldest brother!"

I went home thoroughly worried and mystified; but as soon as Connie came back from Scarccliffe, I begged her to unriddle my riddle by telling me with how many gentlemen of the Surtees family she was acquainted? To my further surprise and vexation she coloured confusedly as she replied that she really could not tell me without counting them upon her fingers; there were six brothers to begin with, all married, and having families, except Mr. Frederick, the youngest, and some of them had grown up sons—the archdeacon had,

and Mr. George and Mr. Robert, and she had seen them all at intervals, though she could not pretend to their intimacy; but why did I wish to know? I told her pointblank, and begged her to confess if there were any foundation for the tiresome, contradictory tattle to which I had been obliged to listen that afternoon.

She hesitated a moment, and then said,—

“There is and there is not, Doris; but I never thought it worth while to tease you about it. It is Mr. Frederick Surtees, the uncle, whom they must all have meant. Miss Pegge Burnell knows and likes him, but Mrs. Peacocke and Mrs. Braithwaite do not visit amongst the Surtees set, and so they have made a little confusion of persons in transmitting Miss Cranmer’s gossip to you. I am excessively annoyed, but what can I do? He is staying at the Rectory now, as he has done at intervals ever since I have been engaged there. Mrs. Surtees walks with us sometimes, and when she does he goes too, if he is in the way; and once or twice she has contrived to carry the children off and leave us together, which is very unkind, for she must see I do not like it. You

cannot imagine a woman so nice and sensible in some things, and so weak and silly in others."

"What is she weak and silly about, Connie?"

"She is one of those people who are never content, unless they have a love affair to pet and cherish; she likes to see every girl married, because, I suppose, she is so supremely happy herself, but then she thinks almost anybody would do. She has taken it into her head that I and Mr. Frederick Surtees should suit admirably. She made no scruple about suggesting it to me, and it is not improbable but that she may have mentioned her project to Miss Cranmer, who is her cousin, and thus the ridiculous story you have heard has been manufactured. If you hear anything more, Doris, contradict it peremptorily, for it is not and never will be true; and don't repeat it to me—it simply makes me feel awkward and uncomfortable, and on the slightest ground, or no ground at all, you know Scarccliffe and Redcross must gossip."

"Gossip is one thing, Connie, and truth is another. What Mrs. Surtees may have taken it into her head to plan, is not of much consequence,

but do you think this Mr. Frederick Surtees has conceived an attachment to you, and avails himself of her approval."

"I do not choose to think about it at all, Doris; it is simply absurd, and an annoyance to me from first to last."

"What kind of person is he?"

"Eccentric but good-humoured, original, and amusing, he is a restless mortal, grotesquely ugly, and so nervous, he seems to be strung on wires. I like him, and cannot help feeling sorry for him, but if there is anything that would make me hate the sight of him, it is the idea that he loves me. Mrs. Surtees ought not to have told me, and I am sure he never would, for he must be conscious that I avoid him. There, don't talk about it any more, Doris; it is odious to me, I cannot bear it."

Connie looked so unfeignedly vexed and distressed, that, of course, I dropt the subject, but I had by no means heard the last of it yet.

Mrs. Surtees was a thoroughly injudicious, warm-hearted woman, of the sort who always suggest themselves to my mind as *very wife* and *very mother*. Her whole being was wrapped up

in her conjugal and maternal relations, and she thought it the most grievous pity in the world that every girl should not enjoy her own opportunities of blessedness. She was a born match-maker of the tenderest kind, and I have no doubt that next to her husband and children, Connie was at this time the dearest and most interesting object on earth to her. Connie's repulsion to her choice was a trivial matter, which she evidently hoped might be overcome, and, in a confidential moment, she had communicated the scheme for her happiness to Miss Cranmer, who forthwith exaggerated it into a fact on the verge of accomplishment, and repeated it for the amusement of her friends. The fable propagated itself very rapidly, and before the week was over I had Mrs. Maurice talking to me about it with the gravest solemnity.

"More unlikely things have happened, Doris, but this must *never* be," she said, with an emphatic gesture of her head. "It must *never* be. I like Mr. Frederick Surtees personally, and there is much that is good and generous about him, but he holds the most deplorable principles. He is in

orders, but he has abandoned his living and his duties as a clergyman, because he cannot conscientiously continue to preach what he does not believe; for this I commend him, but I should be most sincerely grieved to see any girl I loved uniting her fate with his."

"You need have no dread for Connie; she will not hear his name."

"My good friend Mrs. Surtees is very impulsive, and she fancies nothing would be more likely to bring Frederick Surtees round to religion and common sense than a nice wife. But he would turn Connie into a little pagan much sooner than she would turn him into a sound Protestant; love is a potent persuader, but I do not believe Connie would guide him to anything higher than faith in herself. But he has a beguiling tongue, and let her beware of allowing an insidious pity and interest to creep into her heart, such as I have known him inspire before. I should have liked to talk to her myself."

"I think it would be better let alone, the matter will soon die away if not stirred."

"It shall be as you wish. I told Mrs. Surtees

what I thought, and I trust she may see it expedient to give up her meddlesome part in it ; but there is no doubt that she has encouraged Frederick in his fancy for Connie. I can well understand what repose such an uneasy, disquieted spirit as his would find in her calm and cheerful companionship ; but we must think of her too ; it would be a life of pain and grief to be tied to him for any woman who had a pious mind. I lament that he should have set his thoughts on her all the more, because, upon a temper such as his, a disappointment of this nature is sure to have a bad and permanent effect."

"I will hear what Connie says ; perhaps she had better discontinue going to the Rectory until he leaves."

"I should certainly advise it. I would rather lay a daughter of mine in her coffin, than see her the wife of Frederick Surtees. My feeling on this point is very strong, Doris. I cannot say to you all I might say, but if I were free to give my reasons, you would be the first to agree with me. It is well for women to marry, but it is very far from well for them to marry without the

dependence that can be placed on firm principles of religion and morality. And poor Frederick Surtees has no such holdfast at all; he is as little reliable as any man I ever knew, his great abilities and learning notwithstanding."

"You may set your mind quite at ease for Connie."

"I cannot set my mind quite at ease, dear Doris, while I see the poor girl looking as she still sometimes does. I was in Mr. Simeon Moore's shop one day last week while Dr. Julius Eden was there, when in came Connie with one of the children by the hand. Their eyes met and they both turned as white as my handkerchief, perhaps she did not tell you of it."

"No; she never said a word."

"You see they do not forget each other; with all their faults and mutual offences on their heads they love as strongly as before they quarrelled. I disapprove of meddling in a general way, but I do think it would be a laudable act to bring those two together again. Pride keeps them apart; nothing in the world else. When a man and woman cannot meet in the most casual way

without visible and painful emotion, I should decidedly say let them marry and have done with it."

"I think that question is for ever at rest between Dr. Julius Eden and Connie."

"Do you, my dear? I am sorry for it. Lovers are too exacting. Do they think all runs smooth in married life? There are many little angles and roughnesses to fine down, I can assure you, and adaptability of temper and disposition is only second to affection, for there are numerous demands for it on both sides. Those two had much better be reasonable and forgiving."

"It is quite vain to desire it; do not speak of it any more, dear Mrs. Maurice, I entreat you."

"Young folks are a great anxiety; there is my boy now, poor Charlie, almost crying to marry little Carry Foxley before he goes to his curacy amongst the colliers, and I suppose we shall have to consent. And there are John Stewart and Martha waiting patiently these seven years for a preferment that has not turned up yet; they will end, I expect, by setting up on a hundred a year, as my husband and I did before them."

“They had better do that than grow old and spiritless alone.”

“I sometimes think so too, but poverty has a sharp tooth, my dear. My husband and I, in our early married days, once came across an old college friend of his living up in the dales on the merest pittance, as the rector of a wide-lying parish. He had been distinguished and had taken a high degree, but we found him in a bare cottage flagged and whitewashed, with rough deal-table and chairs, and the coals in a barrel under the dresser, smoking a pipe over a volume of the Fathers, and the nicest, prettiest girl in the world waiting for him. He took heart at seeing John and me, and they married, but I think they never fairly got their heads above water. He was a hard-working, excellent man, but he had neither connections nor patron, and I believe they are at Amberwaithe yet.”

When Mrs. Maurice got amongst reminiscences and generalities, she was eminently discursive, and nothing stopped her now but the arrival of Connie home after her day's work. Ratner to my dismay, she then at once revived the topic of

Mr. Frederick Surtees, and reiterated to my sister all she had previously said to me. Connie flushed with vexation, and answered with an air of pride and reserve that she was not responsible for idle talk, and she would not have it repeated to her, which tone took Mrs. Maurice utterly by surprise. Every one knew Connie's gentleness and sweetness, but her impatience and wilfulness at the sound of uncalled-for advice or interference were not so patent.

"You mean kindly, Mrs. Maurice, but what you tell me is unnecessary," said she quickly. "Such warnings are intolerable. No one has a right to speak to me on a matter of mere gossip as if it were a fact; I have told Doris before that I would not and could not bear it," and then she left the room.

A minute or two of silence ensued, which Mrs. Maurice broke by saying in a half-amused, half-annoyed manner,—

"I never saw Connie betray the least irritability before, Doris; it is a bad sign. Often after a grievous sorrow and disappointment like hers a girl will marry out of pique, for the mere sake of

getting rid of the burden of her own thoughts. I hope—I hope Connie will not do that insane thing! I have said my last word to her, however, on these sensitive subjects, and all there is left to pray for is that by some means or other Dr. Julius Eden and she may be reconciled. If that does not happen, I have my fears that Frederick Surtees will prevail.”

All that evening Connie was restless and unquiet; she could neither sit to her work nor her book for five minutes together, and her mind seemed to be thoroughly upset. Papa asked what ailed her, to which she answered, “Nothing,” but when we got upstairs to our room alone she said abruptly,—

“Easter falls early this year, Doris. I shall have a week’s holiday, and I will go to Aberford.” I answered that I was sure it would do her good. “Yes,” added she, “I want time to think; here I seem in an incessant whirl and confusion. I believe I was rude to Mrs. Maurice—I do not feel always my own mistress. Oh, Doris, I am so very, very wretched!” And then there followed a dreadful passionate outburst of weeping, which

lasted half through the night, and left its woeful, pallid traces on her face for a week after. I began to think that thorough change from home and all its often reviving tortures of memory would by and by be, not a choice but a necessity, and I determined to watch my opportunity to suggest it; for it was clear this life of incessantly recurring strain and emotion was not one to be borne without grievous and permanent injury, both to her mind and her body, and it was the duty of all who had influence with her to end it.

XIII.

A BRAVE SOUL.

CONNIE went away to Aberford two days before Ursula came home from Erlstone loaded with farewell gifts from her pupils and their grand-mamma. They had parted excellent friends, past differences notwithstanding, but Ursula had not been successful yet in meeting with another engagement to suit her views. Miss Heywood had done her best in making inquiries, but she intimated, in a letter of this date that governesses were too numerous and too generally efficient for a lady without any special accomplishment to find it easy to command the salary of one hundred a year, which she required.

“People want to educate six daughters at the cost of one, that is the modern fact,” was Ursula’s comment on this suggestion. “If they send a

girl even to a third-rate school the expense must be nearly, if not quite, a hundred a year, and yet they begrudge the sum to an instructress of half a dozen. I am in no hurry, I can wait. If I cannot have money I must have other advantages to compensate."

It was while waiting in this spirit that she one afternoon announced to me, on coming in from her walk, that she had met the Fortuner, looking perfectly civilized and respectable. The encounter had made her quite sprightly and jubilant, and she speculated with eager curiosity on the probabilities of his calling at our house on the following day. But he did not call either on the following day or afterwards, and she prevailed upon me to pay a visit with her to Mrs. Peacocke, his intimate friend, for the purpose of finding out whether he was returning to live at Avonmore. I did not quite like some of the symptoms of her inquisitiveness, but when I ventured to ask why she manifested so much interest in the movements of a person whom she disliked, she took me up shortly with the reply that it was nothing to me; she wished to

know and that was all. Mrs. Peacocke was smiling and patronizing as usual, and when Ursula introduced her subject of inquiry into the conversation and asked if Mr. Barstow were coming back to Avonmore, with some significance she told us in her mincing tones that he was.

“He will reside at Avonmore permanently now; you know he has come down to make preparation for the interesting event,” said she.

“For what interesting event?” asked Ursula.

“Have you not heard? He is going to be married in May, and to such a *charming* woman, I am told.”

“There is no accounting for tastes.”

Mrs. Peacocke laughed softly. “Not repenting, are you, Miss Ursula?” said she with prime archness. “His wife will hold quite a position; she is a widow, a Lady Crosby, whose husband was knighted. We want to know whether she will drop her title and be plain ‘Mrs. Barstow,’ or whether she will retain it and be ‘My Lady.’”

“I should think it will be a matter of very little consequence.”

“Of very little consequence to you, Miss

Ursula, but of some importance to her. She has children, Mr. Barstow was telling me yesterday, and she requires a responsible person as their governess. I mentioned *you*."

"Oh, Mrs. Peacocke! what a blunder! You know that appointment would never suit me for certain reasons that I need not mention!"

I did not grudge Ursie her little triumph over our patronizing friend, if she felt it as such, which apparently she did; but Mrs. Peacocke's smoothly spoken answer was quite in the humour of a retort. "He appeared to think you might have done very well, but for a little asperity of temper and a tendency to domineer, which might not have been agreeable to Lady Crosby. But though you would not suit her, I hope you will not be long without a place, my dear."

"Thank you," said Ursula, curling her lip, but she took leave with an uneasy air of defeat.

This was the day when Connie was to return from Aberford, her short Easter holidays having expired. She was at home when we reached it, and Ursula accompanied me straight upstairs

to see her. We found her unpacking and rearranging her clothes in her wardrobe, and she only desisted from her occupation for a moment to greet us and answer one or two questions about aunt Maria. I noticed that she looked very white and worn, and Ursula observing it too, proceeded to make her remarks aloud.

"I thought you were quite well now, but how wretchedly ill you do appear, Connie; what in the world ails you?" said she with petulant contempt, as if the poor girl's looks were a personal reproach to herself.

"Nothing," replied Connie negligently.

"Nothing! it is very far from nothing, I'm sure. You might have seen a ghost and not have recovered your wits after the shock."

"I am tired," was the next plea.

"You must be in a very poor state of health if a railway journey from Aberford can knock you up to this degree!"

Connie continued her movements like an automaton, but though Ursula went on with her sharp observations, she spoke no more until we were alone, when I locked the door to secure

us from intrusion and begged her to tell me what was the matter.

“I have seen Julius,” was her reply.

“Oh, Connie! I am so sorry! How—where?”

“He got into the same carriage as myself at the Colster Station. He did not see me at first, and laid down his rug and newspaper, but when he looked up he was as startled as I was. He stretched his hand to the door, and I believe he was going to spring out, but there was no time, for the train was a fast one and moved on directly.”

“Was there any one else in the carriage besides you two?”

“A kind old Quakeress. The next time the train stopt he left it.”

“It was an unlucky meeting.”

“Yes. I could not help shivering from head to foot as if I were cold; I could feel he was watching me.”

“Did he say anything?”

“Oh, no. I looked out of the window all the time. Don't tell Ursula, dear Doris.”

“You may rely upon me.”

The next morning Connie resumed her walks into Searcliffe and her teaching at the Rectory, and so continued for a few days, when she brought us word that she should be required to stay there altogether during the temporary absence from home of Mr. and Mrs. Surtees and Mr. Frederick. She had been left in charge of the children once before, but I was sorry she should have to take the burden now, when she was so little fit for it; though she herself embraced the opportunity of escape from Ursula's presence with genuine thankfulness.

You might have thought Ursula was possessed by an evil spirit from the system of persecution she had now established over the poor girl. Indulged malice grows, and hers was stronger and bitterer than ever. Two days after Connie's return from Aberford Ursula assailed her with sudden vehemence, for no apparent provocation, as a sly, artful, double-faced creature who was not fit to be trusted out of sight for a moment; and when Connie glanced up in deprecating dismay and I attempted to take her part she surprised us both by adding, "You might well

look the deplorable being you did when you came back from aunt Maria's. *I* know who travelled with you! It is of no use to try to take *me* in. What do you think people will say when they hear of your going about the country to meet Dr. Julius Eden? I call it perfectly sickening—worse than Miss Pegge Burnell's party."

"You must know it was accidental, Ursula—but who told you?" said I, for Connie was too hurt to speak.

"Accidental! Don't talk to me about accidental! And never mind who told me—there are always plenty of people to see and report that kind of thing. And what sort of an opinion must Dr. Julius Eden have of you, do you suppose, Connie? I call your way of going on a humiliation and reflection on the whole sex!"

"Come away, darling,—come away; don't listen to it!" I whispered, putting my arm round Connie's shrinking form and drawing her to the door. She went without a word, her poor heart stabbed and quivering cruelly.

This scene recurred more than once, and more than twice, and perhaps it was well that she

should be removed from the torture of its constant repetition; but she looked dreadfully ill when she left us, and it was not without anxiety that I thought of her day after day at the mercy of those lively, vigorous little Surtees children. On going in to see her, however, when she had been absent scarcely a week, I found her with the merry trio listening to an interminable fairy tale, the little boy perched on her lap, and the girls on the rug at her feet, and all of them looking cheerful and happy. Evidently this society was good for Connie. I would not interrupt the story, but having heard it brought to a critical point, from whence it would be continued at a future time with new interest, the children were prevailed on to retire to the nursery, and leave us to our private chat. My first question was when Connie would return home.

“What should you say, Doris, to my not returning at all?” was her reply. I said nothing, but waited for explanation, which she gave. “There is a chance of the Surtees giving up this living and going to a better in the north. If they do leave Scarccliffe I should like to go

with them. I am fond of these children—they are very affectionate; you don't know how they comfort me, though there's great pain in it too."

"If Ursula remains at home I will not say a word against it, Connie darling. But I hope Mr. Frederick Surtees will not be there."

"No, he is gone or going abroad. But it is quite uncertain about the living yet—it may not be accepted, and Mrs. Surtees hopes it will not; for she would prefer remaining here—only the income is nearly as much again. It will most likely be settled as soon as they come back. I feel a longing for change now that I cannot describe."

"And if the Surtees remain, what shall you do, Connie?" I asked her.

"Oh! in that case, I am afraid I should not have courage to do anything."

When I told them at home, papa and mamma lifted up their voices strenuously against Connie's leaving us to go to a distance, but a smile broke over Ursula's face and she declared it the most sensible project she had listened to for a long time. But, after all, the Surtees did *not* go into the

north, and no change was made; for Connie would not commit herself to the chances of a life amongst strangers, though Ursula never ceased to urge it for a single day; until Providence beneficently found her a new situation in Dorsetshire at a reduced salary of sixty pounds a year; to which she set off full of her usual feelings of pride and self-gratulation; and swift coming events in our quiet home soon afterwards put all idea of Connie's abandoning it out of the question.

XIV.

A LOST HOPE.

ONE morning during this spring—the seventh of April it was—there came to me my brother Anthony's letter, in answer to mine which I had written him about Mr. Westmore the elder. It was quite unsatisfactory; he had not done and could not do anything in the matter, and Bertie, who was considered to have the harder head, laughed my sentimental anxieties to scorn. The same post brought me a colonial newspaper, which they had sent as containing a paragraph announcing the decease of Mr. Jonathan Halbutt, which had taken place near the date of their writing—only a week subsequent to it, I think. A line in red ink directed my attention at once to the following passage:—

“We have this week to announce the death

of Mr. Jonathan Halbutt, better known in the colony as 'Honesty Jonathan,' which took place yesterday at his residence near this city. He is said to have been the wealthiest emancipationist living, and many of our charitable institutions are largely indebted to him. He earned his liberty by discovering to the governor a plot to escape, contrived by seven of the most dangerous and daring prisoners in his gang; and from that date he steadily retrieved himself, until at his decease he was considered one of the most able and influential men of his class. He obtained his paradoxical cognomen from his practice at one period of his career of delivering lectures up and down the country, always taking for his text the old axiom that 'Honesty is the best policy,' and illustrating it by numerous stories and anecdotes which his personal adventures had brought to his knowledge. His offence was forgery, for which he and his partner, one Paul Westmore, were sentenced to transportation for life. Westmore, we believe, died several years ago. 'Honesty Jonathan' leaves a large family."

So it seemed that in this world my friend was

never to lose his inheritance of shame. Life will not be reeled off straight and smooth by any winder amongst us all. Divers tangles are there in that skein, which, when broken, flutter apart into a hundred loose ends, and never will be woven into the formal pattern of the web. Ragged they are, and ragged they will remain, until the piece is finished, and death takes it off the tenter-hooks, and folds it away. Here was the term of my hopes that the stigma might be cleared from the name of my friend; I felt this failure quite conclusive, and having folded the newspaper into a parcel, I sent it down to the library, that it might be given to Mr. Westmore if he called there during the day. I kept the house myself until evening, in the anticipation that perhaps he might come; but as he did not, after tea I went out into the garden to refresh my mind and spirits.

If there was any fret or disappointment in my heart, this was the season and hour to still them. The effulgence of the day was gone, but all the west was suffused with a rosy glory, and opposite in the east was rising the pale crescent moon.

There was not a breath in the trees, not a twitter, not a note. Under the cliffs where the tide was in, the waves dashed up, only deepening the sense of repose and twilight by the unseen ebb and flow of their monotonous music. There are times when in the hush of nature the cares of human life stand rebuked; when everything around speaks to the heart solemnly of the event that shall end them all. Our struggles, our rebellion, our defiance, are dwarfed to infinitesimal proportions in the presence of the irreversible mutation passing ever silently before us. Our little hope, our puny ache, what are they in comparison with the great aggregate of joy and sorrow in the world since time began? A grain of sand on the sea-shore of life; a breath pulsating for a moment, and then quivering into stillness for ever: to us *all*; to the whole throbbing creation besides *nothing*.

I thought upon this, and pausing at the end of the holly walk, where grew a very ancient yew, I fell to reflecting how many generations had lived and died, loved and suffered, since that old tree was young; from which I passed into a

speculation of how many generations more might become coffin-dust ere its sound heart would decay and its dark green crown fall before the strong south-western storms that could only bend it now? Thence peacefully my soul travelled forward to thoughts of that long eternity in the light of God, to which all time is but as a moment; all anguish, all care, all striving, but as a cloud that is passed away. And if for me, then for others; the day and its burden must be borne, wild though the weather and the burden heavy, but they may be borne with quiet courage and holy patience, which are the most lasting strength; there is "a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother," journeying ever by the same way, though perhaps long unrecognized; and when the pilgrim sinks to the earth and faints with weariness, beneath him are the everlasting arms that shall bear him to his blessed rest.

My reverie was broken in upon by the sound of approaching footsteps, and, turning round, I saw Mr. Westmore coming along the holly walk towards me. We met with a silent handshake, and then paced to and fro side by side.

He was the first to speak: "I am sure you were grieved this morning?"

"Truly, truly grieved; and your mother?"

"She took it very patiently; perhaps she had been less expectant of a good result than you or I. She was, as usual, more anxious to lessen any soreness I might be supposed to feel than to demonstrate her own."

"I fear Mr. Halbutt's death ends all our hopes?"

"Yes. I have a moral certainty that my father was innocent of wrong, whether in deed or in intention; but the death of this man destroys all chance of establishing it by his confession. We must acquiesce in this twist of fate. Guilt goes unpunished often of human retribution, but of Heaven's never, and so, also, may the innocent suffer under a ban for a lifetime, but life's end rights them very surely."

I was sorry to feel that, while he tried to speak in a philosophic and even cheerful tone, there was, nevertheless, a deep undercurrent of bitter disappointment in his heart. It was natural, but it was held in check, and soon we began to speak

of other things. As the moon rose higher, the west faded to grey, and the hush deepened, and fell upon us both; a thoughtful breathing time after a heavy blow.

He was just about leaving me when Connie came down the garden with Miss Kitty and Miss Janet Layel, who had called to return a borrowed book on their way home from Scarcliffe. They exchanged a few hurried words with me, and passed hastily through the rustic gate into the Grove Fields; and Mr. Westmore seemed all at once to have forgotten his own concerns in his interest to know who they were and where they lived. When I had told him, he gazed impatiently after the retreating figures, and then with a sudden resolution bade me good-bye, and pursued them.

I remarked to Connie that I was not aware Mr. Westmore was known to the Layels, on which she replied, rather reluctantly I fancied, "Were you not? I have often suspected it myself; I am sure Miss Kitty has a life of romance under her quiet exterior."

I asked no further question; I felt my heart

labouring heavily in my breast for no reason at all; but it passed off soon, and I only remembered that I was grieved by the disappointment I had had in Anthony's letter and newspaper in the morning.

XV.

A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT.

It was about a month after this event that I took my way up to the Down Cottage, alone except for Dandy, not having seen either Mrs. Westmore or her son during the interval, which was rather unusual, though not sufficiently so to create any anxiety or astonishment. I knew he was then much engaged with his pupils, and busied besides in his favourite Studies, and he was never looked for at our house except when he had leisure enough to make the visit nothing but a pleasure. In the holidays we saw him very frequently, but in the working months only at intervals, but our friendliness was so smooth and satisfactory that he was at all times equally welcome, and none of us ever dreamed of complaining of neglect.

That day, however, mamma happened to remark

that it was rather a long time since we had seen or heard anything of the people up at the Down Cottage, and I said that I would go over after dinner and visit Mrs. Westmore.

When I look back now to that lovely afternoon in budding May, and remember myself as I started out from our garden quite cheerful, strong and able, with Connie warning me not to be late in returning, I think—Can it be really me, Doris Fletcher, lying here in this shaded room utterly helpless and dependent? But every great change in life is sudden or wears an air of suddenness. Can any foresight or preparation lessen the blank death leaves amongst us? or lighten the blow where it falls? It seems to me that we are for ever walking blindly, and that each step leads us to a dull or a tragic surprise.

It was a glorious day, and I enjoyed it with every fibre of my frame; a sense of lightness and buoyancy diffused itself warmly through my being; a renewal of youth and cheerfulness, such as at one time I should have declared impossible to me. But it was there; I felt it, and yielded to it, and did not with foolish reminiscences of

past pain strive against it or seek to assign it to any tangible present cause. I speak of it thus distinctly here, because I shall never have to speak of it again—that was the last of my *happy* days. Such restful content as abides with me now is something quite different from what we mean when we talk about happiness; it is more like the wearied calm that falls upon old people who are peacefully wearing away to the land of the leal; and I thank God for it, and am resigned as to a good, if bitter portion.

As I approach this brief episode of my life, I linger—a puzzle and a vexation to myself—yet lingering will not help me.

Before my mind's eye there rises even yet the picture of the sunny and shadowy downs, and the white clouds skimming over the sky like flocks of snowy birds before a pleasant breeze. My feet neither hastened nor tarried until I came to the stile overlooking the steep garden and the cottage in the hollow. Then they paused, and for a moment all being seemed to pause too, and my heart in the midst of it.

Looking up at the great myrtle on the house

wall stood Mr. Westmore, and hanging on his arm with the confidence of dear affection was Miss Kitty Layel.

A full revelation flashed upon me like a flash of lightning! These were lovers who had loved in their youth, who, after long separation and fidelity, were, by a kind caprice of fortune, brought together again. "So be it," said my heart, and hurried me away from the sight of their tranquil joy as if it had been some vision strange and horrible.

For a time my confusion of mind was too great and too impetuous for me to possess my thoughts distinctly. That little scene in the garden at the hollow had been a surprise to me—nay, it had even been a shock. I had no *right* to feel it so—it came in the natural course of events; but the natural course of events is often unexpected, and smites us with the suddenness and pang of death.

I felt smitten so. When I had gone about half a mile on my homeward walk, a faintness and trembling of the limbs overcame me and I sat down to rest. Dandy, panting and jubilant,

presently joined me, and there we stayed for some time. The sun was setting behind the softly rounded green hills, tinting with red light the dappled clouds which were a prophecy of continued fine weather; the tide was dashing in against the cliffs with measured music; there were many sails out on the sea swift moving before the wind, and in the west the water glowed like ripples of fire. But all this glory of nature was now a mere blank to me; I was so oppressively weary of everything that I only felt the vague wandering up and down in my mind of some such thought as this—"What is our life worth that we should make so much ado about it?" And certainly my life without any deep personal stake in it had often seemed a very flat, stale, unprofitable business. During the last few years I had often envied the young folks in whose little dramas I had taken an interest their pleasure and their pain; I had felt that to win back my youth with all its unfructified possibilities I would gladly have accepted labour and poverty throughout the time that was to come; but every such desire forsook me now—for anything the future

could have to give, I did not care if I never saw another sun.

Perhaps others have experienced this failure of faith in God and in themselves, and I need seek no plea for it. In spite of reason and philosophy it will come—nay, in spite of religion too, and to me it was then like darkness that might be felt, brooding over me wickedly and chilling me to the very soul.

Presently I lifted myself slowly from the ground as if my limbs were weighted with lead, and set my face towards home, but I diverged from the main track to lengthen the way, and took that path on the brink of the wood growing in a precipitous ravine, through which Connie had persuaded me to follow her long ago, when we were walking to Erlstone Forest. The tree tops waved fresh and green now, and as the twilight gathered fast and thick I was obliged to take heed to my steps amongst the coarse grass and trailing weeds that fringed and hid the ridge, lest I should miss my footing in the gloom. I was so weary that more than once I stumbled and with difficulty saved myself from coming to

the ground; my head was dizzyed, my eyes half blinded with a surging fever of pain. I longed to be at home, quiet—where I might lie down with my face to the wall, and be still while the bitter ache ached itself out and left my life stagnant as it was before I knew Mr. Westmore.

While I was hurrying forward I descried the village and the grotesque front of the Priory, its windows glancing jewel-like in the last red rays of the sun—its long dusk avenues of fir-wood, lime and beech. For a moment there was an ardent longing in my soul to escape from the monotony of life, and to take flight into an entirely new state of existence. Then a wild leap at my heart, an aimless flinging out of my hands to catch at anything, and I was lying in the bracken under the trees below the precipice, all my body one thrill of agony.

I did not become insensible. It seemed now that I had dropt in one instant from a paradise of healthy sensations into a hell of torture. I could not stir or cry out; I could only moan in the extremity of my miserable pain.

In one second of time—in one second of time

this change was come upon me. I was lying on my right side with my arm crushed under me, and the night air wafting the bracken against my face. In the midst of my agony I could remember the snakes and toads and creeping things that infest the damp undergrowth of woods, and shivered with natural repulsion. Then I heard Dandy running to and fro, whining and barking along the top of the cliff in search of a way down to his poor mistress; next a man's voice calling to his children at the farmstead near, then the striking of Redcross Church clock, all with wonderful distinctness. The merry chirp of some insect at my ear was loud as a bird-call, and the rushing of the rising wind overhead had all the resonance of thunder.

Slowly the darkness fell, and one by one gleamed out the stars. I counted them as I lay, and noticed their size and brilliance. The cloud on my brain was gone: my fevered fancy took to itself wings and flew far and wide—to mediæval superstitions, to dismal histories of overwise men who brought themselves to tribulation by fate-reading in these letters on the heavens, then

with a delirious swoop to kitten Cosy pranking herself before the glass of the chiffonier doors.

A little while after there was a panting beside me, then Dandy's breath upon my face. "Poor Dandy!" said I, and the dog's misery melted my own heart. He whined round and round me, ran a few yards off, and came back as if encouraging me to rise and follow; he seemed sadly disappointed that I did not. I tried to writhe myself over into a new posture, but the chill and damp with the pain had stiffened my limbs and sent rending pangs of torture through every nerve.

As I lay I could see the parlour at home, with nurse Bradshaw taking in tea, and papa, mamma, and Connie waiting and wondering why I did not return. It was bright and cheerful; it had been a pleasant home as it seemed to me now that I lay bruised, broken, and shivering amongst the bracken, out in the night and alone but for faithful Dandy. A hundred insignificant little times and scenes came back to me, with the clear full-coloured sharpness of a picture. Why do such trifles haunt us so irrelevantly?

Redcross Church clock struck again. I had

lain there but one hour, and yet it seemed half a lifetime ago since I was walking in health and strength on the cliff above, arraigning the justice of God to his helpless creatures. A fevered thirst began to breathe like fire through my dry lips, and to add its craving to my pain. I could see in fancy the dim night shore, where the tide was low, and hear the soft ripple, the silver ripple, the cool, wooing ripple in my quickened imagination; then my mind ran on swift hill streams, on reedy brooks flowing in shaded places, and on wide rivers widening to the sea.

O tortures of helpless Tantalus! I would have given the fee simple of a kingdom for a draught of water.

What a weariful, weariful hour! The noisome dews were steeping my clothing, the airs sighing dismally through the bracken, the winds tossing the trees apart that the stars might look down on my misery. A deeper hush pervaded the woods. O Heaven! to sleep and never wake again! All the past years of my life seemed blotted out, and this writhing pain and burning thirst to have endured from the beginning. I

had heard of a man falling down a pit shaft and remaining there for four days undiscovered, and then being taken out alive. What if I were to lie four days in that unfrequented place?

Redcross Church clock struck again. Again—again. Midnight. As twelve tolled out, Dandy barked frantically. He had been still for a space, but now he rushed violently to and fro, and his impatient misery struck me as with a new pain. I stretched out my free hand as he came near me, and with a queer, sobbing pant he lay down and licked it.

There was another interval of silence, such a silence! Then the first hour of the morning.

Homeless wretches lying out in woods of nights, are such nights wearily, drearily, hopelessly long? Who can realize them, softly pillowed, warmly curtained, safely bolted and barred against the assaults of bitter poverty?

Two. Three. Four. The lamps going out in heaven. The dead hour of the night. The deep, deep, noisome darkness heavy in the close ranks of trees; the air cold and clammy as a sepulchre.

A pale, grey lightening of the sky; dim branches waving against it solemnly; clouds tinted with yellow light, flushed — Morning! Sunrise in the east, and the tide coming up, up, up, with a merry dancing motion on the level sands.

But yesterday, Connie and I had risen early and wandered out on the cliffs to see the dawn upon the purple sea—to-day I lay shattered, mind and body, amongst the salt bracken and the night dews, having passed in an instant from the plains of life into the dark valley of the shadow of death.

Then my heart seemed to break, and I prayed God that one of his angels might take me by the hand and guide me through.

XVI.

A PRISONER FOR LIFE.

BUT I was not to escape yet. In exquisite joy and exquisite pain alone do we learn truly what the life of the body is.

I was insensible when I was discovered by two labourers going to their work in the fields—others had sought me all night vainly—and I came to myself again, lying on a mattress on the floor of my own room at home. Mamma, Connie, nurse Bradshaw, Dr. Eden, and Mr. Peacocke were present. When I opened my eyes, it was with the mute agony of a tortured animal; plaintive but uncomplaining. I did not speak, but looked round at them all, remembered last night and its horrors, and was thankful for those kind familiar faces. The tears were oozing from mamma's eyes, and trickling down her cheeks

unwiped away; nurse and Connie were removing my wet clothing, and Mr. Peacocke was busied with his surgical arrangements. I took the whole scene in at a glance, and then dully watched Sarah who was kindling the fire, how the little blue flames shot up amongst the chips, then caught the gas in the coal, and blazed away merrily.

Dr. Eden was the first to speak. "Not so bad as it might have been, Miss Doris," was what he said. "Brother Peacocke will give you a little trouble, and then you will begin to know yourself again."

"Do you think I shall live?" I asked.

"Live? why not? Here is a broken arm, and something amiss with a rib or two, but nothing worse, I trust," he replied encouragingly.

Afterwards I submitted myself to the manipulations of the surgeon. Connie told me that they did not extort a single groan or cry, but when they were over and I was laid in my bed the cambric handkerchief I had held to my mouth was bitten through and through in twenty places. I was then well-nigh exhausted, and

begged to be left alone. "You know there was always a touch of the wild beast in me," said I, painfully smiling at mamma and Connie. "I like to have my aches and miseries to deal with in solitude. Don't talk to me, and don't move about the room."

Of course I was obeyed; Dr. Eden and Mr. Peacocke departed, nurse went below to put Sarah's heavy feet in list slippers, and mamma, after papa had been in to see me for a moment, went away with him, while Connie ensconced herself as a watcher out of sight. The only thing that moved was Cosy, who had crept into the room, and now, jumping stealthily on the bed, came purring up to my face with feline inquisitiveness to see what was the matter; she then lay down within reach of my caressing hand, and purred herself to sleep on a corner of the blanket.

It was a very beautiful morning, and as I lay in my bed, when I could abstract my thoughts from my pain, I figured to myself over and over again that little scene at the cottage in the hollow. The hours were very, very, very long. I got

no rest from my suffering, and when Mr. Peacocke came again there was more fever than had been anticipated, and dreadful racking of the limbs. In addition to the aching of the broken bones it was more than possible would be joined the agonies of rheumatic fever. They came, in fact, but I lived through them, and survived. It appeared that I was very tenacious of existence.

I shall not dwell on this disastrous period longer than I can help. Two months after my accident elapsed, and I ought to have been recovering, but I was not. My mind had become clear and calm again, but I could not move a limb or turn in my bed without help. None of our outdoor friends had yet seen me; Ursula had been up twice from Dorsetshire, but had returned the next day, and dear Connie had been obliged to resume her teaching in Scarccliffe; during the hours of her absence lame Jessie was my constant attendant, and her clever little fingers arranged fresh flowers for me every morning to please my eyes with their new variety. Then day by day Mr. Westmore stopt at the door to inquire, and

once he brought Miss Kitty Layel to see if she could be of any use or comfort to me; the Maurices called and Miss Cranmer, but I could not bear to receive any of them, and when Miss Janet Layel brought me a new magazine, with "My Winter Garden" in it, and a message that she knew it would be to my taste, I had not the heart to read it. By that time I had begun to think that in no garden, winter or summer, spring or autumn, should I ever walk any more, save by memory and imagination.

The medical men did their utmost to give me hope; but as midsummer passed over and the golden grain began to wave ripe in the fields, while I still got no better, I could not help saying to Connie, "Even if I live, I shall be a helpless cripple all my days."

In the month of September, Sir Cesar Wilde was in Scarccliffe, and it was thought advisable that he should see me. How well I remember little Jessie's buoyancy of spirits that morning when he came with Mr. Peacocke and Dr. Eden; she had made up her mind that the great doctor from London was sure to cure me, and for an

hour or two I almost caught the infection of her hope.

For an hour or two, but not longer. When the wise men had made their examination and gone out to talk it over below, I was left alone; watching and waiting for the issue. No one came to me for ever so long, but at last, lifting aside the curtain, I found Connie had entered the room unheard and was standing there with a quivering face in which I read my doom at once. She stooped down, and kissed me repeatedly, whispering in a voice broken with sobs,—

“Oh! try not to mind, Doris,—we will all be feet to you.”

I could only draw a long quivering breath, and turn my face from the light, murmuring, “God’s will be done.”

The great surgeon had pronounced that I might live to be a middle-aged or even elderly woman, but that I should never set foot to the ground again. I had suffered an irremediable internal injury beyond what Mr. Peacocke’s skill had discovered. This answered to what I had all along suspected, but to have the cruel sentence

laid on me without a glimpse of hope or doubt took sad effect on me. In my blanched, hollow, painful face my features were almost irreco-gnizable, so aged and worn were they with never relenting torture of body and mind, before I had lain under the decree a week.

The first person who made her way up to my room in spite of every discouragement was Miss Pegge Burnell.

"You wonder what brought me here, I dare say?" she began gently enough—you would not have believed Miss Pegge Burnell could be gentle to look at her. "It is a sort of fellow-feeling, I suppose. I know what you have been going through, each ache of the body, and each rebelling of the mind, because I have been through it myself. The accident that made me the thing I am happened when I was younger than you—ever so many years younger. But I have lived to be fifty-nine, you see,—so don't despair."

"Are you no more than fifty-nine?" I asked, looking up at my visitor's shrivelled face, which might have been a hundred.

"Fifty-nine my last birthday—eighteen and

three months when I was crippled as you see."

"Will you tell me how it was?"

"It was after my first ball, and my last, as it proved to be. I was coming out of the house, and there was ice on the worn steps; it was a New-Year's ball at Roseberry, your old home,—where General Villers lived then, I should tell you. It happened in a moment, my foot slipped and down I fell, twisting my spine and putting my left hip out. I didn't die of it, and that was all. Captain William March was by—he had put on my cloak, and whispered that he would see papa in the morning, but he never did. Where was the good of it? He was a fine dashing young fellow. I never saw him again until a few years ago,—a major-general he was then, all swollen with fat and pride. I knew him though. I think women have better memories than men. He did not recognize me, but he made some noisy fellows stand by for my chair to pass, and touched his hat to my misfortune. He was a gentleman always, was William March. Oh! if you knew that I was Daisy, thought I! But

where was the use of vexing him? I said nothing and went on. It was hard to do though. Have you much pain, Doris?"

"Oh! yes."

"You will have more. When the east winds set in all my bones are full of toothache. It is a miracle how they have hung together so long on such a rack. Some of us are wonderfully strong in the grip we keep of life; I shall survive many of my sound and whole acquaintance yet, and so, I dare say, will you. Begin by not letting anybody in who is not comfortable to you, shut out Mrs. Peacocke with her pulled face and wrathful fulminations—she is no good, I can tell you; neither are the Foxleys of one bit of use. I am not so bad as I am painted; I have learnt to say, as King Arthur says in that grand poem,—“I have *suffered* my life, and that which I have done may God within himself make pure.” I have been so used to stand alone, and to think, act and bear alone, that it is most natural to me to be left to myself. There are very few people whom I can endure to listen to on religious subjects; I have had all my doubts, difficulties

and consolations betwixt God and myself throughout my life, and they must remain so to the end. God does not deal with us alike; my lines did not fall to me in pleasant places, but I long since made up my mind that it was all right, and that His will and not mine must prevail from first to last. You have reached the same conclusion by painful ways too, and I have a sympathy for you that I have not for happier people. But try to keep up your spirits. Mr. Maurice sees further and sees better than most of his kind, and is very good to listen to now and then; and so is his wife: they are pious, kind folk—real Christians who would not give a hard word to an impenitent dog; and if you are to lie here all your days, as I hear them say, you will be thankful for charitable company; I always am.”

After Miss Pegge Burnell had been admitted there was less excuse for keeping my other friends out. I saw the Maurices when they called; but I had not yet regained strength to make the effort of expressing my resignation. They all seemed to think that spiritual interests must be my mainstay now, and that my life, having

become useless to myself and others, might be fitly dedicated to God. But if I had had to seek my faith and hope in those dark days of pain and prostration, hardly should I have found them.

Two thoughts of comfort had I in my helpless anguish. The one was that Philip Massey had loved me ; the other, that although while in the world I might have nothing but tribulation, still I had an abiding trust in Him who had overcome the world, and therefore I must have peace at the last ; but these were old thoughts, well tried before this cross of faith and patience was laid upon me, and they bore the proof of it until the calm I possess now folded its wings over my soul, after the ordeal had been suffered.

XVII.

RESIGNATION.

WHEN my fate was pronounced irrevocable, it was suggested, and finally arranged, that aunt Maria should relinquish her own house at Aberford and come and take up her abode permanently with ourselves; and Connie, who was a darling comfort to me, set her wits to work to devise a more cheerful invalid prison than our little room looking over to the solitary downs. For a week or two, as I lay upstairs with my watchful nurses and merry little Cosy, I could not help hearing the rap, rapping of workmen below, but whenever I sought explanation, my curiosity was met by evasive replies until I began to suspect that some agreeable change was preparing for me, long before Connie announced that I was to be carried down to the drawing-room floor; on a level with which

a sleeping-room had been contrived for me, and a door of communication broken through, so that I could be wheeled in and out on my sofa every day. Papa and mamma made themselves quite happy over the event, and I was obliged to smile and seem glad too, though I had, perhaps, never felt my affliction more poignantly than I felt it then. The old-fashioned window had been enlarged and lowered, so that lying on my couch I could look out on the garden without lifting my head from its rest; and in that slow, dreamy occupation I spent the first day of my being downstairs, with mamma and Connie by me.

It is very sad, very oppressive to reflect that a pain, an isolation, a captivity is *for life*. Show the mind a term to it, however distant, and immediately there is a ray across the blank wall, a break in the thick cloud, a light in the heavy darkness. It is long, long ere the condemned for life meets face to face with the spirit of resignation, and even when met, greeted and entertained, yet there are often separations again, and weary hours of seeking without finding the lost friend and comforter.

I was no better or more faithful than others; I had my periods of bitter, rebellious repining, my moments when I coveted death as a deliverance more than I can express. But it did not come for all my craving.

Aunt Maria was very good to me; any one who suffered whether in mind or in body had an irresistible claim upon her; she had little sympathy with the gay or the fortunate, but her whole heart went out towards those who were sick and in misery. She was a great stay, too, to poor papa and mamma, who, though they hid it from me, felt my condition most keenly, and mourned over it together in secret. But about my couch they brought none but cheerful faces, and Connie's the cheerfulest of all. The necessity of forgetting herself in caring for me had done her good. She no longer wore a permanent look of sadness, and if, now and then, the cloud dropt down over her sweet face, the moment she became conscious of me it cleared away and she met my eyes with a calm, sunshiny smile in hers. 'We can many of us look bright to keep others in good heart when there is a sore aching in our own breasts, and the

cheerfulness that pervaded my invalid room was not often at this time much more than surface deep, I am pretty well assured.

And yet soon the reality came; friends and acquaintance came, and I found myself asking questions and taking interest once more in their doings—I believe I found myself even taking a kindly interest in gossip, and no details of Connie's day amongst her little scholars was too small for me to listen to at night when she came home. Miss Jenny Layel, too, became very acceptable to me, and I had never liked Miss Pegge Burnell so much; and there was little Jessie with her knots of leaves and flowers from the woods and fields, which by and by became my calendar.

I had not yet seen Mr. Westmore. Before I was moved downstairs he had gone up to town with his mother, and at the beginning of October they had not returned. Neither had he written to me. In none of our previous absences had we corresponded, and it did not occur to him probably that I might like a letter now. Yet I should have liked one very much indeed; my mind was full of anxious curiosity to know why he was so long

away, and yet a foolish, half-ashamed, half-jealous feeling withheld me from inquiring of those who were the most likely to know. Since the night of my accident I had not seen Miss Kitty Layel, and her sister never named her to me—they all suspected more than the truth; I never loved Mr. Westmore: as my friend I prized him, and as my friend only; the sting of it was that he would want me no longer, since he had found his earliest and best sympathizer in the woman he had been attached to formerly. Some persons seem to think there is no jealousy except in the passion of love, but friends can be very resentful of an intruder between them. I had quite conquered the unworthy feeling, however, by this time, and I was even thankful that Kitty Layel and he should have again met. But I had, nevertheless, a little struggle with myself before I could ask her sister about her and say that I should like to see her if she had leisure to pay me a visit.

“I am going to lose Kitty next month, you know,” was her reply, “but I am sure she will come, and be delighted. Here, Cosy, cat, I want you.”

Miss Jenny Layel fenced her face from my view, or mine from hers, for a moment or two by means of the white kitten, and I had time to collect myself and make my voice smooth as I echoed, "To lose her?" interrogatively.

"Yes; she and Mr. Westmore are to be married at last. It is a very old affair; I scarcely remember the beginning of it. He would worry me into my grave in six months with his dilatory let-alone-ativeness, but that is Kitty's look out. Perhaps she will be able to stir him up, but to me an irresolute, inactive companion is a terrible drag. I would not live with them for the world. It was an age since their separation when he found Kitty out again, but they seemed just to take each other up where they had left off. Did any resemblance in their faces ever strike you? It did me the moment I saw them together. Kitty's happiness is quite regenerating her."

"Will they stay up at the Down Cottage with his mother?" I inquired.

"That is uncertain. They have twenty different schemes which will most likely come to nothing;

they have even talked of emigrating to New Zealand, but what are they to do there? He has occupation enough in Scarcliffe, and Kitty is not ambitious; she will have attained the climax of her life when it is her privilege to hold his pens and darn his stockings. She is a sensible, practical body, our Kitty, the very woman to put his ghosts to flight, and make his every-day walk comfortable. You know the family history of course?"

"Yes, and what a stumbling-block it has been to him all his life."

"I was only a school-girl then, but I have a vivid recollection of Kitty's sorrow and their separation. They parted, but refused to break their engagement, and Kitty, though we soon lost sight of him, never would consider it at an end. I like to see constancy rewarded. But it was rather strange he should have lived near us so long, and that they should never have met until one night last spring at the end of your garden—do you remember it? He recognized and followed her then, and they took up the thread of their story and went on spinning as if they had never

dropt it. They must have had great faith in each other to do that after more than ten years of absence; but I cannot recollect a day when she has not talked of him more or less, and his mother declares to Kitty that it was just the same with him."

"If they go abroad shall you go with them?"

"Oh, no, I shall stay where I am. But I do not *really* believe they will go; Kitty would prefer remaining here. It needs but little to make two persons like Mr. Westmore and our Kitty contented; leave him his books, and give Kitty a routine of small loves and duties in his vicinity, and you will find nowhere an easier, happier pair. They have not one luxurious or extravagant taste between them, and they must have thoroughly learnt by this time that true satisfaction is not to be found in a multitude of possessions. Kitty's heart delights in domestic details, and I am glad she will have the opportunity of gratifying it; her excellences and virtues will have full play as the wife of a man poor, laborious, and persecuted by fortune; she would never have come out in her full strength had all gone smoothly

and happily with them from the beginning. I assure you, though she looks so quiet and unobtrusive, she has a fine character, our Kitty—a very fine character indeed.”

It was pleasant to see Miss Jenny Layel’s partial fondness for her sister. Whoever knew them, and knew also Miss Jenny’s stories, could not help seeing how all the good heroines were more or less derived from Kitty. Kitty’s piety, Kitty’s patience, Kitty’s truth, faith, courage and tenderness were her sister’s ideal of sweet womanhood; so in each of her books you had moving to and fro a blue-eyed, fair-haired woman, with a soft voice and a heart full of all human charities. Sometimes she was young, sometimes she was old; sometimes she was single, sometimes married; sometimes happy, sometimes grievously afflicted; but the original woman was always identical with Kitty. Of course Kitty did not recognize these numerous silhouettes of herself, and I have even heard her depreciate them as tame and uninteresting; for she had herself a taste in fiction for the great, aspiring characters who do things, and are always at war either with themselves or the

wicked world in general, but I can vouch for the close resemblance.

I asked Miss Jenny if she should not feel very lonely when her sister was gone?

“I am never lonely,” was her answer; “I have been much more dull in a house full of company than when left to myself for days and days together. But I shall miss Kitty very much, and I don’t conceal it. Some persons may think me selfish in expressing my regrets, since she will be the happier for the change, but there are two views of that selfishness. I know nothing more consoling than the remembrance of affection; it is good to recall the evidences of love; I like to bring back even scenes of tears and sad partings which were signs of it, for it is the salt that keeps life sweet to the close. Can you imagine the blank of a heart which cannot in present solitude revivify the memory of some one who once loved and was loved by it? Some persons may make a duty of stonily repressing their feelings and bidding you God-speed with dry eyes and smiling lips, but I would rather be wept over and assured by the pain of leaving in my own breast that I

shall be regretted and remembered often. But don't let us anticipate or grow too sentimental for the occasion; Kitty is not lost yet—let us go back to her. She has given up her teaching since the marriage was settled, and I left her diligently stitching at some housewifely task of preparation for it when I came here.”

“Tell her to bring the housewifely task with her and sit with me some afternoon in Connie's absence; perhaps I can even help her, for I have the full use of my hands still, though I am a prisoner to my sofa.”

“I will spare her to you, but to no one else. But I have made up my mind that they are to go on living at the Down Cottage. You speak in favour of it also, Miss Fletcher. It is by far the most sensible and reasonable thing to do.”

“So I think, and I shall certainly maintain that view; it would be unwise to abandon a place where he has friends and the assured means of living just when he is increasing his responsibilities. Besides, you must not be quite severed from Kitty; it would be unkind in him to carry her off to the end of the earth.”

Miss Jenny Layel expressed her entire acquiescence in that proposition, and left me feeling considerably cheered and enlivened, though I could not have explained why.

A few days afterwards Miss Kitty took me at my word, and came to our house, bringing her sewing with her, and we had a long afternoon together, talking over the past, the present and the future with the assiduity of women who have a deep and mutual interest in their subject. She assumed that I was generous enough to sympathize in her happiness, and I did sympathize in it with all my heart, fully. No little mean thought could intrude in the presence of that good, womanly, candid creature. She told me the story of her early love for Mr. Westmore, and all their bitter trials afterwards with an open-hearted confidence that would have touched me to the quick under any circumstances. I saw what repose for his restless, disappointed spirit there would be in her large and tender nature, and I had a profound satisfaction in seeing it. I told her I was glad for him, and she said with a soft, caressing regard in her eyes, "I knew

you would be glad." Had any doubted it? I thought, but let the question pass; there are some charges to which silence is the strongest refutation.

Then we went on to speak of their present arrangements and future prospects, and I found that her predilections were decidedly in favour of remaining near Scarccliffe and going on quietly at the Down Cottage.

"In any new place there would be a new struggle, and I think we have had struggle enough—we want to be happy now," said she. "We are not so young as we were, and I grudge spending more of the years of our lives in strife. Here we have a few friends ready-made, and of a trustworthy sort; little worldly pelf will suffice us, and that Paul has the best means of earning with his pen and his scholars. I think the future lies before us fair enough. His ambition will not be altogether ungratified if his future ventures be as prosperous as the last. For my part, I shall be blissfully contented, I know, however humble our home and our means may be. And his mother will be always with us; it would be hard

at her age to make another violent change ; but he will decide."

"What detains him so long in London?" I asked ; "or rather what took him there at all?"

"I think he wishes to tell you that himself," was the answer. "He comes back next week, and his mother and Francis with him."

"Francis?"

"Yes. He has returned to England ; imagine the joy of that reunion!"

"I can imagine it. Miss Kitty, has he brought any good news of his father? I see *yes* in your face ; you might as well tell me at once."

"Since you have guessed it, you shall read Paul's letter that came this morning," replied she. "I shall tell him I have shown it to you. Jenny said it was wrong to keep such a piece of intelligence from you for a single day ; you will rejoice in it no less than we rejoiced ourselves, I know."

That letter! Kitty kept her shining eyes on me while I read it from beginning to end, and when we looked at each other at the close there

were tears of joy on both our faces. Francis had come home and had brought a written and authenticated confession which established his father's innocence. He never would have come home without it, his brother said. To obtain it had been the object of his life when he left England as a boy. For years he had watched, waited, striven, entreated in vain. From a man in prosperity nothing was to be extracted, but at the last, when life and money were slipping out of his grasp, the wretched Halbutt had sent for the young man who had haunted and dogged his respectability without a day's intermission, and before him and certain official persons he had made a statement which fully exonerated Paul Westmore the elder from complicity in his crime. To obtain a recognition of this in the proper quarter was what now detained Mr. Westmore in London.

Too late! too late! how sad it was. The wronged man had long since done with his share of the suffering and injustice, but it was a sacred duty to clear his name from stain, and his sons would be the happier and the better for

accomplishing it. There was a tone of free, proud independence in the letter where it touched on this; but towards Heaven a submissive humility for all that was past. He had frankly, fully forgiven evil fortune for the sake of the good that now redeemed it. Kitty would be thankful, he said, and I should be thankful, but his own heart seemed to expand in a passionate gratitude. Perhaps it is a feeling impossible to realize save by those who emerge into the light after a long, dark eclipse of sorrow and shame. But I did not think it would anywhere materially alter the character of his life; that had been too long set in one narrow groove ever to run out of it easily.

I asked Miss Kitty how Mr. Westmore and Francis had found each other out, there having been a total absence of communication ever since the latter left England, after his father's trial. She told me by means of an advertisement in *The Times*—I always read that cluster of advertisements of lost and found on the first page of the world-wide paper, and think what tragedies of life and death they faintly shadow forth.

“Is it Francis who would tempt you all away from England?” I said presently.

“Yes; his home and his hopes are at the other side of the world, but he will go back to them and find them sufficient without us. He has led a more active life than Paul, and the ways of his adopted country suit him. We shall see him in a few days; he used to be a frolicsome, wild lad, very different to his brother, but I expect to see him quite altered in every way. I suppose he has gone through everything of labour, discouragement, and privation that a man entering friendless and penniless on a new society can go through. But he has won the great object of his patient endeavours, and meanwhile has earned worldly prosperity enough to make a home for the woman he has loved and waited for through much tribulation. They are going to settle on a farm in New Zealand, and he would fain transport his mother, Paul, and myself to increase his colony. But I love England, and trust we may send him back alone; there is nothing in that life for us, and I shall feel the less compunction since I know that he has his Lizzie and many friends

of many years to welcome him. It will be settled soon, for he sails in December—if not with us, then without us. I am most regretful for his mother; her life has been full of such sad separations.”

“So it has, but I hope you will not go,” said I. “Let there be no more sacrifices; I have a selfish motive in wishing you to stay, for I shall not like to lose my friends now I am so dependent on them for company and cheerfulness.”

“I am glad you count me amongst them, and Paul you will never lose as long as you live. I understand what you have been to him, and how he has valued you. Let me confess it—once I was miserably jealous of your intimacy, but you were so unsuspicious you never found me out. Do you recollect lending me his first Studies? and do you recollect our meeting him one evening in the Priory Avenue? That was the first time after ten years; he did not know me, he did not see me. All Jenny’s fantastical notions of sympathy fell to pieces at that disappointment. I thought there was a fatality in it, and when you consulted us

about a mysterious friendship which we both quite well discerned, then I said he would forget me."

"But he never did," I replied. "We suited as friends, but nothing more. There was no room in either of our hearts for a second love."

"Do you believe a second love is ever as strong and true as a first? I never will admit the idea that it can be."

"I do not believe Mr. Westmore could ever love another woman as he loved you; I am sure I could never have loved another man as I loved Philip Massey, who is dead, and I think my sister Connie will not replace her lost love; but I cannot speak for people in general: judging from what we see, either they are capable of a series of attachments, one as good as another, or half the world is wisely contented to put up with a second best affection, when fortune has deprived them of a first. Miss Kitty, your little romance is a rarity in women's history. In common life you would each probably have chosen anew, and if you had met in later days you would have become strangers in fact, even more than in name.

It is very few who at ten years' end find a living love, and not a dead mummy in their hearts, I imagine."

"I cannot understand how any woman can become indifferent or forgetful where she has once fondly and truly loved. I can remember a thousand trivial words, and looks, and incidents of my earlier courting days; ah! how happy we were!"

She looked at me with a soft mist in her eyes and a transfiguring glory of expression through which I saw her face in the bloom, and glow, and tenderness of youth.

"And you are happy now," I said; "you were never happier perhaps."

"It is good to issue out of dull days into a light that has been despaired of. Yes, I am happier than when I was young," she acknowledged—"much happier. Then it was all of one tint with my life, which had never known a single cross or care, but now it comes with the added delight of contrast. But it is for the old love; I could have found no joy in a new one. I could never have fitted my thoughts and my

heart to a life which was detached from the memory of my early days; some women can and do, but I marvel at them."

She went on talking until nearly dusk—now cheerfully of her future with Mr. Westmore, then of her past without him—until she had talked me into a mood as pleasant as her own. She had a sweet, sincere, generous nature which no trial could have soured, but there was a warm rejoicing atmosphere about her in her late-found happiness which I felt better than I can describe. At last she folded up her housewifely work and departed, at my request promising me another visit soon. Then in came Connie from her teaching, and aunt Maria, and mamma to see if I was tired, and I told them all the good tidings of Francis Westmore's return and the proofs he had brought of his father's innocence. I expected they would say how glad they were, but they seemed to have a first thought for me in all that concerned Mr. Westmore, which was foolish. Mamma stroked my hair and sighed. Oh, how I wished people would not pity me! how I wished they could be generous, like Kitty Layel herself, and believe

that I sympathized in her happiness without a thought of myself. They never *said* a word, but with their eyes they looked at me a world of commiseration.

XVIII.

A TRUE FRIEND.

FOR some little while past the rumour about my sister Connie and Mr. Frederick Surtees had been reviving, and more than once I had been seriously appealed to, to declare whether it was true or false. I had even fallen into some doubt myself by this time. Connie's spirits were becoming capriciously variable; now her old sorrow seemed to strike back upon her heart like the dull, throbbing toll of a minute bell, then she cast care to the winds and astonished me by her paroxysms of gaiety; but in these last there was always to me a tragical vein. I did not speak to her about these changes, or seek to know from herself the causes of them, but I judged that the hope of a perfect happiness being taken away, reckless thoughts came over her of snatching at

the best that was left, and I had now and then a fear that she might issue out of this wild phase of feeling into the passive, negligent disbelief in the beauty and value of life, which is with many characters the ultimate issue of disappointment. The sense that there is nothing worth living for is surely the saddest that can get possession of the soul, and she had experienced it in many a painful, weary hour already; I think I should almost thankfully have seen her absorbed into new duties and a new sphere, when I began to perceive a chance of its permanence.

I heard much praise and some dispraise of Mr. Frederick Surtees. Some said he was shallow, others that he was vacillating; some that he was generous and honourable, others that he was unstable as water. Miss Pegge Burnell declared him a Christian and a Samaritan, twenty people besides lamented his erroneous vagaries, and accounted him no better than a heathen. Connie spoke of him occasionally, and then always with interest. In this there was nothing conclusive, and would have been nothing suspicious, but

for the circumstance of our little world having begun to talk of possibilities which suggested divers doubts and fears to me. There was a brief while when no announcement that Connie could have made would have taken me by surprise. I was convinced that Mr. Frederick Surtees had not acquired any hold on her affections; but they met daily, they had become intimate, and had every opportunity of studying what was good and pleasant in each other's character, and we are told proverbially that propinquity is dangerous, and that many a heart is caught at the rebound.

So our friends and acquaintance gossiped and had their say, and I waited in uncertainty, until Miss Theodora Bousfield, returning from her long absence abroad, came up during one of these winterly afternoons to pay me a visit. She had not seen me since my accident, and after due inquiry and commiseration over that, we talked of her travels, of sights abroad and events at home, until she was rising to leave me, when I alluded to an omission which had struck me as very singular by saying,—

"You do not ask after Connie, Miss Theodora."

"No, I am too deeply disappointed in her," was the reply.

"You must not believe all you hear," I said, supposing her to allude to the reports concerning Connie and Mr. Frederick Surtees.

"And I am surprised too. I have been thoroughly deceived in her character. Pride is not worth so much as love, and I am sure she loved Julius Eden passionately, or she would never have suffered as she did, and she ought to have forgiven him. She was wrong once, and he was ten times wrong, but I did believe she was generous and would accept his *amende*. I know him; he would spare her everywhere, and would be as hard on himself as the most exacting woman on earth could desire, but I suppose revenge was too precious to be lost."

"What do you mean?" I asked, breathless with astonishment.

"What I say. I thought Connie was a genuine tender-hearted woman, and she has shown the poorest spirit of pride and vindictiveness in

sending back his letters as she did. No, I cannot forgive her."

"We are at cross-purposes, Miss Theodora," I interposed. "Since your long talk to me last winter, nothing whatever has passed between Connie and Dr. Julius. They once met accidentally on the railway, but did not exchange a word—to what mysterious letters are you alluding?"

My visitor looked at me for a minute or two in silent, bewildered dismay, but at length she said,—

"Do you mean to imply that Connie never told you of the manly, generous confession Julius wrote to her after I saw you? He said all that profound affection, respect and penitence could say; if she had bidden him return to her at once, she would have done nobly, and she might have done it without a pang to her pride, but instead, she took counsel with petty dignities, and returned the letter. That was what an ordinary woman would have done, thinking of her little self first of all. I was angry—I had not common patience with her when I heard it."

"I can pledge you my word that Connie

never saw that letter, Miss Theodora," said I, solemnly.

"And after the chance meeting in the train, he wrote once more. I imagine what he would say to her, loving her passionately, and remembering how he had injured her, while he sat opposite her anguished face, for those miserable twenty minutes. I know he entreated her to forgive him, to forget the past, and be reconciled, but again Connie's small feelings of self and revenge took the opportunity of indulgence, and a second time the letter was returned."

"I repeat it, Miss Theodora, Connie never had that letter—she never had either of those letters."

"Are you fully convinced of it, Doris? Would she hide it from you? It is a dreadful thing if she had not."

"I am as fully convinced as if I heard her speaking now, and declaring she never had them."

Miss Theodora dropt into a chair, and became silently reflective for some minutes. A wretched suspicion of *Ursula* had flashed into my mind. I recalled her restless, worrying desire to drive

Connie from Redcross at the time when those letters ought to have come to her ; I remembered her anxiety to meet the post and get possession of whatever was delivered. The first must have been abstracted by her, read and reposted within the few days succeeding Miss Pegge Burnell's party ; the second must have told her of the meeting in the train, her acquaintance with which had puzzled me at the time she betrayed it. I saw it all now—from the moment the idea struck me, it was a certified fact in my judgment. The same suspicion had dawned upon Miss Theodora, and she alluded to it, by saying,—

“Then the truth is, Connie to this hour does not know that Julius has sought her pardon? His letters fell into wrong hands, which sent them back to the writer. I guess the enemy in this case.”

“Wherever the letters went, Connie, I am persuaded, never saw them,” was my firm reply.

“It is a strange and painful thing altogether. They *might* have been reconciled, and now I suppose it is too late? Is it *true*, Doris, that she is to marry Frederick Surtees? The very

thought of it sets Julius beside himself; if there were a prospect of happiness for her in such a marriage, he would bear it, but he protests that he will see her and warn her against such a terrible sacrifice. The poor fellow has been twice in confinement, and he is never safe. It is kept close here, but Julius knows it, and now I have told *you*, which I should not have done but for Connie's salvation. I dare say she may like him, but she ought to know what she risks."

"I do not believe there is anything really serious between them," I interrupted. "I have not spoken to her about it for months, but when first the rumour arose she vehemently denied it."

"I must tell Julius! Oh, Doris! if in any measure it lies with you, help to reconcile them. Julius will make it up to her for what she has undergone."

I could not help smiling at Miss Theodora's innocent enthusiasm—as if any future could retrieve the past! Connie might forgive and love, and be happy, but that would remain for ever and ever; the darkest hour in her day of life.

"I can do nothing," was my final remark; "I

think it a grievous pity that they should not forgive and forget, if they would be happier together than they are apart; there has been a great amount of pain and suffering already, but perhaps they had better risk a little more for the chance of coming to a good understanding and ultimate content."

"I agree with you, they had better *see* each other and talk it out. But don't warn Connie,—don't say a word; let Julius plead his own cause. Since I know she never had those letters, my confidence in her revives; if she prove refractory, *then* try your eloquence. Good-bye, I am in haste to communicate my news. After all, they will be happy!"

I would not gainsay Miss Theodora's cheerful anticipations; mine were somewhat dashed by the remembrance of how, in all probability, the reconciliation had been delayed. I, however, said to myself that it was vain to appeal to Ursula or to reproach her, for she would have a hundred and one good reasons for what she had done, and it was safest not to provoke more persecution.

When Connie returned from Scarecliffe that afternoon, she told me she had met Miss Theodora Bousfield, who had been very eager and kind in her greeting.

“She is uncertain in her manner,” said she : “to-day she was gracious and affectionate as ever ; yesterday I saw her, and she bowed as distantly as if I had offended her. She bade me give her love to you, and say she would come soon.”

It appeared that Miss Theodora had not mentioned her visit to me, and I, for wise reasons, kept her counsel too, but it was not very easy. I longed to brighten Connie’s face by telling her what I had heard ; for I knew it would brighten it, but I refrained myself, and the evening passed over without my secret having bubbled over, which several times it threatened to do.

XIX.

A RECONCILIATION.

DR. JULIUS EDEN made the opportunity of pleading his cause in person the day after Miss Theodora Bousfield's visit. Just before dusk nurse Bradshaw came tiptoeing into the drawing-room, and whispered cautiously, as if afraid of being overheard, though there was no one there but myself,—

“Miss Doris, there's Dr. Julius Eden at the door wanting to come in and talk to you.”

The announcement gave me a nervous shock, though I was anticipating it, but after a moment's demur I told her to admit him. It was the first time we had met since my accident, and we shook hands in silence. I could not stir from my recumbent position on the couch, and he stood by me where I could see by the light of the

fire shining up in his face that he was touched and sorry, and that, for the instant, pity for me put his own thoughts to reproof. Perhaps that helped to soften me, for as my eyes met the kind look in his, all my old feelings of friendliness towards him came back upon me as strongly as if he had never offended, and when he began to speak I perceived that notwithstanding his grievous blame I must still regard him as within the pale of humanity and pardon. I mention this distinctly, because my ready and easy forgetfulness of his misdeeds may be an excuse available for others who presently imitated my example. Theoretically I hold that there should be solemnity in an act of grace; practically, I believe that a penitent and kind glance between those who love each other go nearer home than the weightiest pleas and longest formulas of forgiveness.

After his compassionate courtesies on my misfortune were over there ensued a pause, which I broke by asking,—

“What do you want with me, Dr. Julius?”

He appeared much agitated, and his first words were not perfectly coherent, but I understood him

to be alluding to Miss Theodora and to his returned letters ; he waited for me to make some rejoinder, but I really did not feel that I had anything to say, so I held my peace, and he then asked,—

“Doris, tell me ; is it true that Connie is to marry Frederick Surtees ?”

“I hope not, Dr. Julius ; especially I hope not after what your friend Miss Theodora told me yesterday,” was my answer.

“Let me see Connie ; have you prepared her for my coming ? Am I to expect a repulse ?”

“I have not said a word to her ; I judged it best not. Your sins are against each other, and only yourselves can condone them. She is not at home now, but she will be in by and by.”

At that instant the front door opened, then the drawing-room door, and Connie entered, with a wearily cheerful greeting of—

“Well, Doris darling, and what sort of a day have you had ? much pain, or not so much ?”

Coming in from the winterly twilight the brightness of the room dazzled her eyes for a moment, and she did not see who was there. She

dropt her heavy plaid, loosed her bonnet, and turning towards me found herself face to face with Dr. Julius.

For an instant they stood apart, then nature, stronger than either of them, kindly took the quarrel into her hands and ended it; putting down the barriers of pride with the irresistible impulse of love. There was not a word, but she was in his arms, her lovely face upturned to his in the intense rapture of long-yearned-for reunion. It seemed to me that she would hardly come alive out of that passionate embrace, for her eyes closed in half unconsciousness as she drew herself away, and sinking down on the floor beside my couch, drooped her head on my bosom. Dr. Julius would have raised her, but I forbade him.

“You have been too sudden; let her be,” said I, and I remember experiencing a feeling of satisfaction in seeing that he too was deeply moved, and no more possessed himself than did my darling.

He sat down close by in pale excitement, and the only sound in the room was the quick fluttering of the fire. Connie remained perfectly motion-

less for several minutes until I grew frightened, and passing my hand over her head caressingly, begged her to look up. But she took no notice, and when Dr. Julius lifted her from the floor and laid her upon the sofa by the fire she had not force to resist.

“Ring for nurse,” said I impatiently, for I saw she was not quite gone, but he only rested her head on his arm and waited very quietly, never taking his eyes from her face, and apparently hearing no more of what I said than if I were the wind blowing on the top of the down.

“Dr. Julius, this is very foolish; Connie will be ill; cannot you see she is already tried beyond her strength. I wish you would go away, you had no right to come; Dr. Julius, do you hear?”

Not at all; my hard words were only feathers about his ears, and at last I distinctly remember telling him, with the fretful anger of helplessness, that he was a “perfectly selfish and intolerable person!” at which climax of eloquence Connie relieved me by opening her eyes and looking up at Dr. Julius, as if she were uncertain yet whether

the figure beside her was really himself in the flesh or only a shadow such as haunted her dreams by night and by day.

To prove it she whispered, "Julius," and half lifted one of her hands towards him.

I was quite sure this scene ought to have a speedy end, and when he had reassured her of his identity, and some of the vanished colour returned to her face, I said imperatively,—

"Dr. Julius Eden, if you do not go away now I shall ring my bell, and mamma will come," but looking round for the stand on which it usually stood within reach of my couch, I perceived that it had been lifted aside and I could not accomplish my threat.

But Connie now quite coming round said, "Oh, Doris," with provoking remonstrance, as if *I* were unreasonable.

"Yes," I repeated, "it is time he went away. You will not sleep a wink to-night from excitement, and then you will keep me awake too."

Whenever I wanted to prevail with Connie the surest way was to allege something about myself; but this time my expedient was rather useless.

The two were standing on the hearth now, oblivious of all the world beyond themselves, and oblivious, too, of all in themselves but that they still loved and were once more together. So I shut my eyes and let them have their time, and as they did not attempt to introduce any tiresome explanations I bore it tolerably well, but was nevertheless relieved when nurse Bradshaw appeared and effected a diversion by bringing in tea.

“You *must* go now,” was then my admonition. Dr. Julius did not appear to see the immediate necessity, and lingered until mamma’s light step was heard approaching; she entered, and comprehending the scene at a glance, said with more surprise than severity,—

“Your papa was sure something unusual was going on.”

I do not know who felt the most awkward, but nurse bringing in the bread-loaf threw a new light on affairs by remarking comfortably,—

“A deal of folks quarrels and makes it up again,” which, indeed, expressed the whole business with axiomatic truth, and obviated the need of any further explanation.

Mamma looked at the pair and said nothing, until Connie began a little gentle tale, which she cut short by offering her hand to Dr. Julius, and remarking,—“So long as you are happy, my love,” and having thus expressed her acquiescence, she went away to tell papa, but soon returned with a message that they were both to go into the dining-room to him. Mamma remained with me when they disappeared, and we had a little talk over the event, first hoping and then assuring each other that it would ultimately turn out all for the best, which it has done undoubtedly.

The excitement of the occasion considered, we had a very quiet evening, Dr. Julius remaining until after nine o'clock. Papa did not say much to either in the way of reproof, and but for the change in Connie's face and air the past might have been all a bad dream. But it was real enough, though the future was made smooth; and I think during the period that followed upon the reconciliation *both* must have felt and regretted the vague shadow it had left, but Dr. Julius especially. I have no doubt he missed the rosy blush, the soft, shy, happy look in Connie's eyes

that used to greet him before she knew it was possible he could be unkind to her; when he came now she would tremble from head to foot, and turn white to her very lips, and for many and many a day the joy of his presence was mingled with an acute pain. He could not but see it; he could not but know that he had earned to himself some reserve, fear and distrust; but I must say he bore it well and acted judiciously, and that it gradually dispersed before the renewed confidence, tenderness and respect of his manner. I do not believe that the effect of any long and deeply felt emotion can be quite done away, and Connie's was not a nature to part with profound impressions, whether of happiness or of sorrow. She could not be her blithe self ever any more, but she might be something infinitely greater and better. Yet—yet I was sorry for the lost smiles and bloom and brightness, and some one else was sorry too.

She used to show him such an innocent, pretty, frank affection; she was so *glad* when he came; now when she heard his foot in the garden she would fly upstairs and not come down again until

she had put on a gentle composure—she did not *feel* it, but she feigned it skilfully—whether skilfully enough to deceive him or not I cannot say—he never complained of any diminution in her love, and it was not diminished; only the heart of the woman veiled what the heart of the child had been the prouder and happier for showing. But they were reaping as they had sown, and if there were a few thorns amongst the flowers, whose life is without?

XX.

FAREWELL.

DAY by day I was now anticipating Mr. Westmore's return from London, but it was not until about a week before the time arranged for the wedding that he came, and then of all the kind, wise, and curious speeches that I had composed for the occasion, not one was ready to my lips. His appearance, at last, took me by surprise. It was after dark when he called, and Dr. Julius Eden and Connie were both present. Nothing ever does happen just as we expect or just as we wish; afterwards I felt and acknowledged that it was safest thus to avert all opportunity of sentimentalism, but at the time I would fain have had my friend to myself to hear and to tell all that had passed since we parted. I remember feeling vaguely disappointment at the

little notice he took in words of my changed condition; I am sure he must have felt sorry, but he seemed to see me only as I had always been; or perhaps he was absent, and forgot that he had not beheld me since my calamity, and having been prepared by description for what he would find, he regarded my helplessness and pain-stricken features as quite familiar to his mind already; or again, he might be so much preoccupied with concerns of his own, infinitely nearer and dearer, as never to give mine a thought. But I do not like to believe this possible, for we had been friends.

He was looking remarkably well, healthier, and more cheerful than I had ever known him, and he talked like a man who has got rid of a secret burden, and feels light in his heart because the incubus is gone. He had come from the Layels and was in haste, I fancied, to be gone again; and, altogether, that much-expected, long-looked-for meeting smote me with far keener pain than it ought to have done. But I put it by, and would not permit myself to think about it.

The following Sunday afternoon Mr. Westmore

came again, this time bringing Miss Kitty Layel with him. I saw at once that a little cross of care traversed the sunny groundwork of her happiness with a shadow that she could not smile away; and when we came to speak of the future, I found there was reason enough for the sad expression in her eyes.

“Yes, we think it will be for the best, and therefore we go back with Francis,” Mr. Westmore said in reply to my question of where they were going to pitch their conjugal tent. “We have considered it maturely, and Kitty agrees with me now that New Zealand will be the home to suit us all.”

We were every one silent for a minute or two after this announcement, and a sense of great misfortune seemed to strike me; but I said at length, “And your sister, Miss Kitty, shall you leave her behind?”

Miss Kitty shook her head doubtfully—I think she could not have spoken at the moment—and Mr. Westmore answered for her: “We hope not. Jenny is wilful and independent, but I think she will acquiesce in our plans when she

has thought about it a little longer. It is very much my mother's desire to go; here, in England, all seems broken to pieces for her and for me; in a new country we can begin a new and happy life."

He glanced confidently at Kitty, who returned his look with equal love and trust, and I could not but see that let them go where they would those two together would be blessed. Nevertheless I felt an inexpressible loneliness in the contemplation of their departure, though I endeavoured to keep it to myself, and the only remark I made was to the effect that I anticipated the acknowledgment of his father's innocence would have removed the only motive for exile.

Mr. Westmore smiled and replied, "No; it may appear strange and contradictory, but it is my chief incentive to it. Our life in England has not been so bright and successful as to make us wish to prolong it under the same general conditions. A thorough change of scene, people and occupation will give us the best chance of happiness in the time to come."

"We could not continue to live here without

retaining some old shadows and bonds, so we think it wise to fly from them," added Miss Kitty, in her gentle voice. "Francis must make his home out in New Zealand, and we are so few we may not be divided. I hope and trust Jenny will come round to our way of thinking and go too ; I think she will."

They stayed tea with us that day, and Sarah was despatched to summon Miss Jenny to join us, and we had a long chat by my sofa, when the rest, for fear of overfatiguing me, adjourned in a body to the dining-room.

"Shall *you* go to New Zealand?" I asked her.

"It will come to that finally of course," was the rather weariful reply. "Kitty is all I have in the world."

"But you prefer England? You will be sorry to go?"

"Yes—yes, I shall be sorry to go. You may think I don't leave much behind to regret, and I don't; only a grave in an ugly, old country town churchyard, where I fancied some day I should like to be buried myself, and poor Tricksy. I

wish I could find a good home and a kind mistress for Tricksy."

"I will take him if it will be any comfort to you; there is my Cosy, but I dare say they won't fight."

"Oh, no, they won't fight, and I am truly obliged to you; it is one weight off my mind. Some people are wretches enough to destroy their pet animals when they must part with them, for which they deserve hanging themselves in my opinion. You will find Tricksy perfectly well-bred and most entertaining. He has been invaluable to me, poor fellow!"

"I was in great hopes that you would all stay in this neighbourhood, especially as your sister preferred it."

"Oh, Kitty will never know a will of her own again; she fancies already that it was her special wish and desire to go before Mr. Westmore determined on it. I am by no means sure that, in the end, they will not be happier, but at first the idea went very much against the grain with me and with Kitty too."

"She only seems to be doubtful now because

of your indecision; she says you have not yet made up your mind."

"Yes, I made it up this morning at church. No number of friends could compensate me for the loss of Kitty; we have been very happy and comfortable here at Redcross. I only hope wherever we settle it may be in the midst of pretty country; I never mope or grow dull when it is bright out of doors; all genuine pleasures such as I relish are cheap."

"There is both fine scenery and fine climate in New Zealand, I have always heard."

"Yes; if we must leave home, I would rather go there than to any other of the colonies. Francis' farm is a good one, and a drawing of the house looks attractive. Once there I shall set myself to work to be happy. I suppose it will be all very different, but I am convinced the absence of genteel bonds will suit me; they say everybody imagines that some vocation to which fortune declined to elect them would have been more agreeable to their taste than that in which they work; for instance, I should like to be a gardener."

“Land is cheap out there; you must have a bit all to yourself.”

“That I certainly shall. We have not told Kitty, but Mrs. Westmore and I have firmly resolved to have a little hutch to ourselves. And my precious old Deb—my servant, you know her—has volunteered to go out with us; she intends to belong to me. Miss Fletcher, my imagination has been running away with me all day, and I have fancied us out there, a little tribe in a strange land.”

“Does the sun shine in your picture?”

“Yes; and it is something like home, green, and quiet, and safe. But I shall not forget this place—the only illusion I ever have is of sounds. Often when I have been still a long while, and the window is open to the downs, I fancy I can hear the chimes at that old church. When I used to listen to them *really*, I was a governess in a country parsonage two miles from the town, and on the summer evenings, sitting up alone in my room, the sound used to come softly over the river; it seems a long while ago, but I shall never cease to hear them, I hope; I should like

to carry the memory and the echo to New Zealand with me."

"You will."

"But it is not *all* bright and cheerful going so far away. When my father died and left us poor and friendless almost, I should have liked it, but Kitty could not agree. Now I am not young, and I feel older than I am, but it is foolish to regret. I have made up my mind to go, and there are compensations at every period of life and in every condition."

When Miss Kitty Layel reappeared in the drawing-room, her sister said to her,—

"Kitty, Miss Fletcher has promised to take Tricksy when we go," an intimation of her decision which was received with a smiling and affectionate embrace.

A few minutes afterwards Mr. Westmore entered, and then they all said good-night to me, lingering over it a little but not uncheerfully. When they were gone and the door was closed, I perceived lying on the table a book which I had seen in Mr. Westmore's hand often, and supposing him to have left it behind by mistake, I bade

Connie put it somewhere in sight, that we might not fail to return it to him when he came to say good-bye."

But he never came again, and never said good-bye.

To spare us a little present pain, our friends will sometimes inflict upon us a regret that lasts for years. Mine thought it would be a sad parting, and that I might suffer from it, and so they hid from me the day of his departure, and when I asked for him he was gone. Ever since it has seemed to me that we really took a last leave of each other that evening by the gate at the end of the holly walk, where he first saw Miss Kitty Layel again after their long separation.

But his mother came to bid us farewell, and on the morning of the day when she was to follow her sister to London, Miss Jenny Layel appeared with the unsuspecting Tricksy trotting cheerfully beside her. He would follow her almost like a dog, and in the delusion that he was only out for a little walk and would presently go home again and doze on a chair beside her while she wrote, he came into my room; and though Cosy received

him with her back up and most uncourteous expressions of inhospitality, he waited by the door until his mistress rose and took him in her arms, whence, after a little petting, she transferred him to mine, bidding me hold him while she made her escape from the room. But then he sprang out of my hold, and mewed beseechingly.

Don't let any one ever tell me again that puss does not attach himself to persons. Tricksy moped and pined in the most distressing way, and I know not how often Sarah had to go up to the deserted house where he had been such a happy cat, to bring him back to me. We buttered his feet again and again, but to no purpose; he did not settle or take to any of us, and finally he disappeared altogether for three or four weeks, and when he returned it was very evident that he had been leading a vagrant life in the woods. Mrs. Braithwaite removed to Ivy Cottage about three months after the Layels had vacated it, and then he presented himself there; but not finding his mistress he refused to stay, though the widow would kindly have adopted him. He was afterwards seen at intervals in the village, and once Sarah,

at imminent risk to herself, brought him indoors and set him down before a saucer of milk; he lapped the milk, and then she introduced him into the drawing-room, a snowy white, powerful, wild creature, enough to alarm any one not accustomed to him. I do not believe that he had quite forgotten the days of his civilization, for he sat on the rug before the fire, staring at it uncannily, but on the door being opened he made his escape, and was never seen again.

While we were vainly endeavouring to console and domesticate poor Tricksy, his little mistress and the rest of them were braving stormy winds and tempests on their voyage to the land of their adoption. They had a terrible time of it but a safe arrival, and in the first letter we received all sounded fair and prosperous before them. Then ensued an interval of disappointments, but being finally housed and settled, they began to thrive, and ceased regretting the old country. Ultimately my brother Anthony joined their colony, carrying with him a young wife, and since then our accounts have been pleasant and frequent. I forget how many they are now,

but they have a good number of children amongst them, and the more the merrier they say out there. Miss Jenny Layel writes to me that she has grown familiar with the prosaic side of many domestic events, of which, until her transportation, she knew only the sentimental; I imagine her a useful, comfortable body, playing the part of universal maiden aunt, teaching little scholars, and then gardening about her hutch, where she tells me she has raised so many English flowers that she can sometimes fancy herself at *home* again. They all speak of England still as Home. I have never told her of Tricksy's fate. In one of her letters she says: "I picture Tricksy standing up on a chair, and having his "tea-cup-tea" with Cosy and you; tell me how he is, and how you like him, when you next write. I wish he were here at this minute; he was an affectionate pet."

But I contrived to omit all allusion to him, though I hoped he was less wretched than in my conscience I feared. A wild life, free from the trammels of civilization, has to some characters charms far beyond warm rugs, cream and sugar,

and I sincerely trust that Tricksy was one of those natural-born Arabs, that he elected to be a wild cat from preference rather than from desperation, and that he lived happily ever after in the lot he had chosen.

XXI.

FOR BETTER FOR WORSE.

Our friends and acquaintance were not slow in learning the reconciliation that had taken place between Dr. Julius Eden and Connie; but Ursula being away from home and out of the range of hearing of it by accident, we tacitly agreed not to mention the renewal of the engagement until the march of events rendered its announcement imperatively necessary. At Christmas Connie gave up her office of governess to the little Surtees children, having plenty to do at home in preparation for her marriage, which had been, after some reluctance on her own part, finally arranged to take place during the ensuing April.

What pleasure I had in helping her! Sometimes she would drop her hands upon her lap, and, after thanking me, she would say how selfish it was in her to think of leaving me—me, so

helpless, so suffering, for a happy home of her own. Then I had nothing to answer her, but that I should rejoice to send her away. She only half believed me: she was not gay in her happiness, as I must call it; indeed, those few months had a peculiar sadness of their own arising out of the past. She had lost the blind, beautiful confidence that life with him she loved must be perfect joy, and she had gained the bitter knowledge that cares, misunderstandings, grievances, and griefs may arise between two who have none in the world dearer than each other. It is generally a cloudless epoch, but with these it was far from that; and I remember I was very glad as the weeks wore away, and mamma said about a fortnight before the event that it would not do to delay any longer, and Ursula must be told. I wrote to her, and received the following letter in reply, after the lapse of several days:—

“DEAR DORIS,—

“The announcement in your letter took me completely by surprise, and I trust you are none of you so sanguine as to expect congratu-

lations on my part. Why was I not apprised of the circumstances earlier? Did you fear that I should set my face against this marriage? If you did, you thought justly. I cannot feel that *you* are free from blame, and I am too utterly disgusted by Connie's weakness to take any further interest in what concerns *her*. I have done all that lay in my power to prevent her again straying from the path of feminine delicacy, but without avail; I even went the length of doing a thing repugnant to my feelings and principles, for which it is quite possible you might have reproached me had you known it at the time; I intercepted two foolish letters from Dr. Julius Eden to her, one at Christmas and the other in April, and returned them to him as a hint that his renewed suit was not likely to meet encouragement; but her infatuation and slavish weakness have defeated my wise intentions, and I suppose she must now take the consequences. Does she expect to be happy? does she delude herself into an idea that Dr. Julius Eden loves her as he did? Surely she cannot be so deceived. He *pities* her, and that, take my word for it, is all; he was taken

with her blooming cheek and her bright eyes, and now she has lost those I do not believe she is any more to him than another woman might be. She will find it out in time. There will always remain the sense of mutual wrong and distrust between them which must inevitably produce misery in the future. Nothing but my sense of the inexpedience and vulgarity of family quarrels would induce me to attend the wedding. I shall only come because it would cause the world to talk if I marked my disapproval by staying away; but my sentiments must be pretty generally known amongst our mutual friends. I presume it is my duty under the circumstances to make Connie a present. What would she like to have—something useful or something merely ornamental? I think I shall work her a cushion with the apple-blossom pattern, grounded with pale sea-green; it is extremely pretty and will not take very long to do. I shall only come home two days beforehand, as I don't care to exhibit my incongruous feelings in your fool's paradise longer than needs, and I know it will be anything but comfortable. The more quietly the

affair is got over the better, *I* think. Connie may make a beautiful bride, but I should not propose her to the sex as a pattern of womanly dignity: I never knew a clearer case of giving *all* for love; it is quite impossible that Dr. Julius Eden should respect her. But I say no more, and wash my hands of the whole affair; say whatever you like to the pair for me, and with love to the others,

“ Believe me to remain,

“ Your affectionate sister,

“ URSULA.”

This document, though in no wise materially different from what I expected, gave me most depressing and uncomfortable sensations. Nurse brought it to me when I was alone, and having *read*, my first thought was how to get *rid* of it, that it might not pain the eyes of anybody else. But before I had time to accomplish its destruction in came Connie, and at once asked if I had not heard from Ursula; when I said yes, she wished to see the letter.

“ Better not; she was in an ill-humour when

she wrote it, and she cannot mean half she says," replied I, crushing it out of the way.

"Nevertheless, Doris, let me read it," and she took it determinedly out of my reluctant hand, carried it to the window, and there, with the early spring sunshine streaming over her bright head, she scanned the cruel words. I watched the tremulous changes on her face—the pain, the pride, the humiliation, the fear, the doubt; but she said nothing when it was done except, "We will not show it to poor mamma and papa?" in which I acquiesced, and then she left the room carrying it with her.

In the evening Dr. Julius Eden came up, and Dr. Eden with him, and after a little chat the old gentleman went to papa in the dining-room and left us three together. Connie was quiet and thoughtful even beyond her wont, and at length, to my dismay, she said,—“Julius, I want you to read this letter,” at the same time offering him Ursula’s contemptible but dangerous epistle.

He received it from her with a doubtful look of surprise, held it a moment or two, still watching the painful expression of her face and then slowly

perused it. As he did this his whole countenance darkened — darkened so fiercely that Connie stretched out her hand and laid it impulsively on his shoulder, saying in a low supplicative voice, “Julius, Julius!”

“It is a wicked letter—a cruel, wicked, lying letter!” exclaimed he, casting it from him. “If we are to be happy, Connie, Ursula must never darken our doors.”

He was moved by a vehement anger, but he did not seem to feel it necessary to deny its charges or to protest his affection, neither did Connie appear to require it; though I believe in giving him the document she had intended making a solemn appeal to his honour to release her, if *pity* and not *love* had, indeed, urged him to seek a reconciliation.

“Come out into the garden,” said he, and through the window I watched their heads moving to and fro together as long as the dusk lasted. Then they reappeared, and Dr. Julius announced to me that Ursula must not be present at the wedding. I had been secretly wishing myself that her coming would be evaded without a quarrel,

but did not see how it was to be managed. There was a mist of tears in Connie's eyes, but she looked subdued and yielding as if she had acquiesced in Dr. Julius' desire whatever it might be.

"No, Ursula must not have the opportunity of coming between us any more," he repeated. "I grieve that I must insist on a separation between sisters, but in justice to both of us I shall require it. Her mischief-making propensities are overruthless to be lightly tempted until our happiness is established too firmly for her to destroy."

Connie sighed and her eyes met his in a long sad gaze; then he drew her fondly towards him, and she gave way and wept bitterly. I could not help feeling sorry for both of them, though I never doubted that they would ultimately attain to the fulness of mortal content and faith in each other. Whatever Connie's weakness and faults she was dearer to Dr. Julius with all her imperfections on her head than any other woman in the world; and whatever his past harshness and misconception she had forgiveness for all and more than all. The shadow of the old cloud hovered still about their steps, but every day and

every month they lived together after their marriage rendered it more vague and more distant, until now the dreamy recollection that it once existed only enhances by contrast the perfect union between them.

I fear if any young, romantic, enthusiastic persons read this history they will experience here a sense of disappointment; I should formerly have experienced such a sense myself, but I have really observed in the majority of cases since that people are happier when some mutual trials, duties and joys have cemented their affection and the close alliance of a few years has worn down their mutual angles or fitted them into each other's loving forbearance, than they are in the heyday of passion.

Sure am I that the whole world cannot show a more trustful, happy, complete life than theirs is now, though the day which should have been its brightest and most hopeful was troubled by so many broken clouds. In their home the atmosphere is one of perpetual heart sunshine; trials may come from without, but never, never more from within. I can say truly that I have not

seen the tears of real sorrow in the eyes of my darling since the night when she hung weeping on her lover's shoulder after he had read Ursula's letter.

But I must remember that I am writing of *then* and not of *now*, and return to my story of nearly ten years ago.

Respecting Ursula, Dr. Julius was determined, and I cannot but think *justly* so. Connie wrote to her, and a gentle, sisterly, grieved little letter it was, but it expressed their wishes with unmistakable distinctness. Ursula replied, addressing herself to papa, and asked if the persecutions against her were, indeed, to be carried to such an extremity that she was to be denied her privilege of appearing as her sister's bridesmaid at her marriage. In that view she had purchased a bonnet and a dress, and she did not see how either Connie or Dr. Julius could find it in their hearts to forbid her presence. Connie would have softened and yielded then, but I think that second letter, if possible, vexed Dr. Julius even more than the first. His distrust of Ursula has remained invincible from that day to this, and no

cordiality of intercourse seems ever likely to be established between them again. Mamma answered her pathetic appeal with a repetition of the first sentence, as kindly conveyed as words could convey it, and in consideration of her absence the marriage was as private and quiet as possible ; none of our friends attending, except as a matter of interest and curiosity on their own account. We did not invite them, but Miss Theodora Bousfield told me afterwards that the church was crowded.

Papa and I stayed at home together, mamma and Dr. Eden and the family at the parsonage alone attending the pair to the altar. Dr. Eden gave Connie away in papa's absence, and I lay imagining it all in the old-fashioned church, until the bells rang out a merry peal and announced that the ceremony was over. A little while after a bonnie white bird came fluttering back to me, looking placid and happy, with Dr. Julius cheerfully protective in his new dignity—and so they were launched into life together “for better for worse.”

And that day is a white day in their *memories*

for ever—a day neither has regretted or had cause for regretting since.

Their story is told, and my task is almost done, but for the satisfaction of those inquiring persons who always like to know what became of everybody, I will cull from the later pages of my Old Thought-Book a few particulars to tie up the loose ends of my story.

Mrs. Peacocke the patronizing, being left a widow and wholly unprovided for, was thankful to accept a home at Lady Betty's, where she holds her head as much above her companions in adversity as she held it formerly above her friends in prosperity. She visits me frequently, and her countenance is as bland, her accent as mincing, and her general tone as superior as ever. It is clearly a help to blessedness to have a good conceit of oneself; she will never be otherwise than a dignified and self-complacent little woman.

The first visitation of death in our household was to aunt Maria; the secret of her life was never disclosed to us, but upon her gravestone in Redcross Churchyard her name stands, not

Maria Fletcher as she was called amongst us, but Maria Somers; her history, tragical I am sure it was, lies buried with her.

Late in life Miss Theodora Bousfield married an Indian officer, General Sir Marmaduke Ross—the world said it was an old love revived again, and I think the world spake truth.

Miss Cranmer is still herself, anecdotic, conversational and gossipy. Mr. Stewart and Miss Martha Maurice married on the curacy. Charlie Maurice and Rosy Foxley also cast in their lot together on a very minute income, but in their case, fortune has favoured the brave, and they are joint tenants of Avonmore Rectory now. All the Willoughby girls are married, and one of the Brown-Standons. Miss Maurice lives at home, single still, and is one of my most acceptable and congenial friends.

Miss Pegge Burnell is much as usual, failing a little, perhaps, but I see her often. The Fortuner and his lady lived happily ever after. Lame Jessie is nurse Bradshaw's coadjutor now, and a healthy, kind girl; Sarah, the rough and ready, having taken upon her the responsibility

of Long William the Fisherman, and a tribe of brown little children of her own.

My sister Ursula has been in Russia for several years as a resident English governess in a noble family. When she was last in England Connie endeavoured to effect a restoration of good feeling between them, but Ursula bore herself with an injured air, and will never look upon herself in any other light than that of an ill-used, misunderstood woman.

Respecting papa and mamma I have but to say that they are with us no longer. They departed out of this life within one short month of each other, mamma being the survivor. The boys never returned to us, but in her last hours their mother thought they were by her and talked to them; they will meet again where partings are no more.

The Surtees family are still in Scarcliffe, but Mr. Frederick died at Rome some years ago; it was said that he had embraced the Roman Catholic faith some time previous, but the rumour was not verified.

For the final glimpse of my darling Connie I

must refer my readers to the first chapter of my story, through which the Avonmore Church bells were ringing their old memorial echoes, "Long, long ago, so long ago, so long, long ago!"

THE END.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY SMITH, ELDER AND CO.,
LITTLE GREEN ARBOUR COURT, OLD BAILEY, E.C.

65, Cornhill, London,
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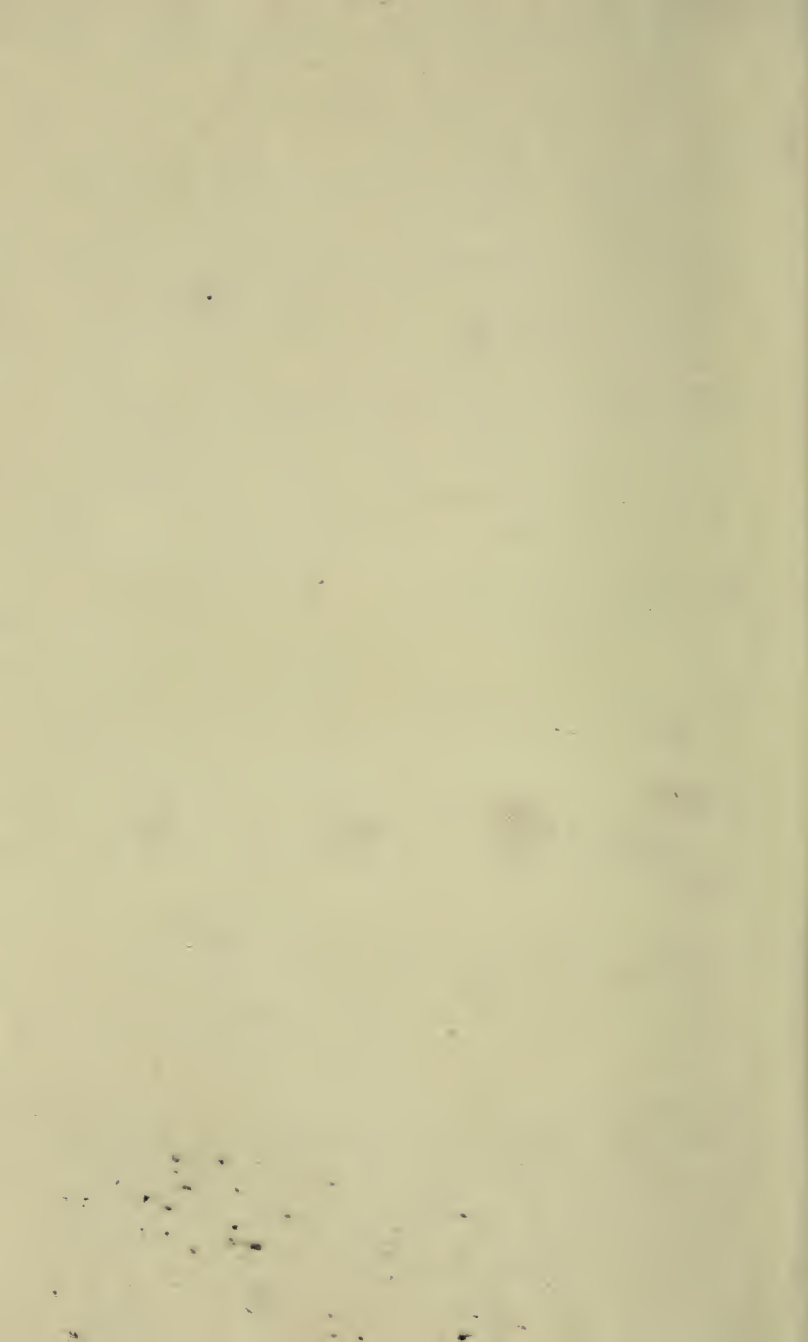
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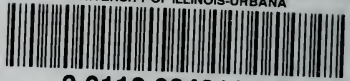
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